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**STRICTLY PERSONAL**

By W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

LIZA OF LAMBETH  
MRS. CRADDOCK  
THE MERRY-GO-ROUND  
THE EXPLORER  
THE MAGICIAN  
THE MOON AND SIXPENCE  
OF HUMAN BONDAGE  
THE TREMBLING OF A LEAF  
ON A CHINESE SCREEN  
THE PAINTED VEIL  
THE CASUARINA TREE  
ASHENDEN  
THE GENTLEMAN IN THE PARLOUR  
CAKES AND ALR  
OR, THE SKELETON IN THE CUPBOARD  
SIX STORIES WRITTEN IN THE FIRST PERSON SINGULAR  
THE NARROW CORNER  
AH KING  
ALTOGETHER (*Collected Short Stories*)  
DON FERNANDO  
COSMOPOLITANS  
THEATRE  
THE SUMMING UP  
THE MIXTURE AS BEFORE  
UP AT THE VILLA  
STRICTLY PERSONAL

*Plays*

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LADY FREDERICK  
THE EXPLORER  
MRS. DOT  
PENELOPE  
THE TENTH MAN  
SMITH  
LANDED GENTRY  
A MAN OF HONOUR  
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**W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM**

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LONDON :: TORONTO

FIRST PUBLISHED 1942

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न. ज. ज. ताल

Class No. ५५८ ..... २/१०.६  
Book No. ५५८ ..... M. ११.८  
Received on ..... १. ५. १९४८

2783

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN AT THE WINDMILL PRESS  
KINGSWOOD, SURREY

A LETTER TO SIR EDWARD MARSH,  
K.C.V.O.

*My dear Eddie :—*

*I send you this little book with hesitation. I am conscious that the small adventures that I describe in it are very tame in comparison with those, so much more thrilling, dangerous and important, that many others have had since the outbreak of war; much of it narrates experiences that everyone in England has had and tells about persons with whom the papers have made most people in England familiar. It was written for American readers because I had certain things to say that I had a notion it would be useful for them to know, and I had no intention of publishing it in England. But when one has been writing as many years as I have it appears that one has acquired a number of readers who like to read what one has written not for its subject so much as for its author's sake; and so, perhaps unwisely, I have allowed myself to be persuaded that I have friends, unknown and otherwise, who would be glad to read this small volume without going to the trouble of sending to America for it.*

*But my hesitation in sending it to you is not only due to the fact that you may find it of no great interest, but to the fact also that it is my first book for many years of which you have not corrected the proofs. I am pretty certain that you*

*will find in it much to comment on with that acidity, mitigated fortunately by humour, generosity and kindness, and humanized by a pleasant weakness for the colon, with which you are wont to castigate looseness of expression and faults of grammar. I am very well aware how much I owe to your keen eye for carelessness, impropriety of phrase and inaccurate punctuation, and it is a misfortune for me that the difficulties of the time have prevented me from taking my customary advantage of your direction. The future (if it is concerned with us at all) will discover that many of the best writers of English of our generation are indebted to you for such proficiency as they have acquired in the practice of writing our difficult language. They said of a composer in this country, better known for his copious output than for his originality, that it would be a bad day for American music when he lost his memory; it will be a bad day for English letters when you, dear Eddie, grow too feeble to hold a pen, to turn the pages of the O.E.D. or to scarify your grateful victims with a sarcastic reference to Fowler's Dictionary of English Usage. May I before then be long, long ago at rest on a dusty shelf.*

*Yours affectionately,*

*W.M.*

*New York. November 12th, 1941.*

## § 1

I HAVE A NOTION that it is well to tell the reader at the beginning of a narrative what he is in for, and so I shall start by telling you that this is not an account of great events, but of the small things that happened to me during the first fifteen months of the war. For more than two years now the great powers of Europe have been engaged in a fearful struggle, a dozen small nations have been invaded, and France has been vanquished: these are matters that the newspapers have reported and that history will deal with. Life has gone on. People have continued to eat three meals a day, to love, to marry, to die a natural death; but I think there is no one, at least in Europe, whose existence has not been in a hundred small ways affected by the catastrophe that has befallen us; and because so far as I am aware no one has thought it worth while to take note of these little things, of no consequence in the current of great affairs but important to the persons whom they affect, I have thought it might be interesting to set down on paper before I forgot them the incidents, trifling in themselves, which seem to have changed the whole course of my life. This narrative is strictly personal, otherwise it would have no sense, but I ask you to believe that no one is more conscious than I how little I count at this

moment when the future of the world may very well be at stake.

I was spending the summer of 1939 at home. My home was a square white house on the side of a hill on Cap Ferrat, a promontory that thrusts its nose boldly into the Mediterranean between Nice and Monte Carlo, and from my house I had a wide view of the blue sea. I had bought it twelve years before when I grew tired of wandering about the world, and I bought it cheap because it was so ugly that everyone who had seen it thought there was nothing to do but to pull it down and build another in its place. It had a large derelict garden and, for the Riviera, where land is expensive, a good deal of land besides. The house had been built at the beginning of the century by a retired bishop in the Catholic Church who had spent his working life in Algeria, and he had built it on the pattern of the houses he had lived in there, round a patio; he put a Moorish cupola on the roof, horseshoe windows in the walls, and a Moorish archway across the living room. Then he had the unfortunate idea of tacking a Renaissance loggia on to the front. It occurred to me that all this Moorish nonsense and Renaissance exuberance were only lath and plaster and could be scraped away to leave a plain house with a flat roof; so I bought it, made the alterations I wanted, whitewashed it inside and out, and furnished it with my books, my pictures and all the various objects I had collected during my travels. I was prepared to spend the rest of my life there, and I was prepared to

die in the painted bedstead in my bedroom. I sometimes crossed my hands and closed my eyes to imagine how I should look when at last I lay there dead.

I hadn't reckoned on the temptation that is afforded by a great neglected garden and a hillside. I had never had a garden of my own before and didn't know that the more garden you have the more you want, and the more you do the more cries to be done. There were pines in the garden, orange trees, mimosas and aloes, and a tangle of wild thyme and wild rosemary. In that country gardeners are cheap—they were paid then little more than a dollar a day—and evcrything grows if you give it water. I planted oleanders and camellias and all manner of flowering shrubs, and I brought avocado trees from California. They bore no fruit for the first seven years, but when I left I was getting three or four hundred pears a year and people used to come from all parts to see them, for they were the first that had ever been grown in Europe. But the great luxury on the Riviera is grass, for it will not bear the long heat of summer and must be dug up at the end of every spring and replanted every autumn. It is a trouble and an expense, but the fresh young green, at once tender and brilliant, has the same moving quality as the look in the eyes of a young girl at her first ball. I made lawns on each side of the drive that led to my front door, and I made a broad green pathway that meandered under the pine trees to the end of the garden. I planted orange trees in a formal pattern on the terrace, and here we used to dine on

summer nights. High up on the side of the hill I built a swimming pool after an eighteenth-century model, and I found in Florence a marble mask by Bernini for the water to gush through. There was a little natural cave at the back, so that bathers could lie in the shade if the sun was too hot for them, and on each side of this I placed two leaden urns that might well have belonged to Madame de Pompadour. From here your eye could roam the Mediterranean, with Nice on your right, and away in the distance was the noble mass of the Esterels.

Such were my house and garden. The crown of my hill was military property. There was a semaphore on the top of it, and there were guns to protect it. About the time of the unquiet period that immediately preceded the Munich agreement I was concerned in a curious incident. I received one day a communication informing me that a party of naval officers were coming from Toulon and wished me to make an appointment to discuss a matter with them. I had no notion what they wanted, but answered that I would be glad to see them at their early convenience. The following morning two cars drove up and half a dozen middle-aged gentlemen were ushered into my living room. They were in uniform, with the rosette of the Legion of Honour in their buttonholes, and three of them wore beards. By the gold braid on their sleeves I judged that they were of high rank. One was an admiral. They sat down with solemnity, and one of them, clear-

ing his throat, proceeded to explain the purpose of their visit. It appeared that they wished me to let them have a strip of my land high up on the hill for a gun emplacement. They evidently expected me to object, for another, breaking into the conversation, explained that it would not interfere with me at all, but indeed would add to the amenities of my property, and more than that (he was of a facetious turn), if war broke out it could not fail to be a source of satisfaction to me to have a big gun of modern design to fire back at the Italian ships as it were from my own back yard. I fancy that the admiral thought this levity misplaced, for he interrupted to say that I was well known to be a friend of France, that France and Great Britain were united in an indissoluble alliance, and that it was inconceivable to him that I should seek to hinder a plan which was of urgent necessity for the safety of the state. I had not liked to interrupt these gentlemen before (I am always somewhat intimidated by persons in uniform, and in order to feel at my ease with them I have to strip them of it in my imagination and see them in their union suits), but now, speaking up, I said that any discussion was entirely unnecessary, because I was only too glad to let the state have whatever piece of land was required and in whatever situation. A murmur of approval issued from those six throats, and both the admiral and the first spokesman, who was a gunnery expert, expressed their appreciation of my patriotism. To this they added a few apt words on the public

spirit so invariably shown by my compatriots. The demeanour of my visitors, which had been courteous but cool, now became almost effusive; there was a buzz of conversation, but I could not help hearing one bearded officer tell another what a fine fellow I was and how much it was to be wished that the French were so pleasant to deal with in matters of this sort. Then we went back to business. An officer who had not yet spoken now made me a longish speech in the well-turned phrases which come so easily to a cultivated Frenchman's lips. He pointed out that the value of land on the Riviera had diminished in recent years and in case of war would fall still more, that the piece they wanted was of no use to me, and that they only needed so many metres by so many metres and when the work was done I shouldn't even know it was there. Meanwhile six pairs of eyes watched me closely. At last the speaker asked me outright what I wanted for this worthless, insignificant, useless bit of property.

"Nothing," I said.

I never saw such consternation blanch the faces of six brave men.

"But you said you would offer no objection to our putting a gun emplacement on your property."

"I have no objection. I shall be very glad to let you have the piece you want for nothing."

"We are quite prepared to pay a reasonable price."

"I'm sure you are," I answered, "but I have lived many years in this country and have received many

favours from the French people. I couldn't think of asking you to pay for a little strip of land that you need for the defence of the country."

There was a silence. Though their eyes were fixed on me I caught a surreptitious glance passing from one to the other. The atmosphere, which had been genial, quite noticeably grew chilly. Then someone said:

"Of course we greatly appreciate your generosity."

The admiral hesitated for a brief period and then rose to his feet.

"I will certainly inform the Minister of your public-spirited offer. We will let you know in due course what we propose to do."

They all shook hands with me very politely and filed out. I could not but feel that, though seafaring men by profession, they were more at sea than they had ever been before. Two days later I received from Toulon a stiff official letter thanking me for the courtesy with which I had received the delegation and stating that on mature consideration it had been decided not to place a gun on my property.

## § 2

I HAD BEEN SPENDING a few weeks in London and did not get home till the middle of July. I brought my nephew down with me; my daughter and my son-in-law

were to arrive in a fortnight. Friends of theirs and friends of mine were coming to stay, and I expected the house to be filled with a succession of visitors till late in September. Then I intended to go back to London for a month before starting for India, where I meant to pass the winter. I had spent a winter there two years before and had found in that wonderful country much to excite my imagination, and I was eager to go back. I have never been able to write anything unless I had a solid and ample store of information for my wits to work upon. I expected this second visit to enable me to get some shape into the multitudinous impressions I had received and to complete the pattern that was vaguely outlined in my fancy. I decided to do no work till I got to India, but to play till then with the ideas that wandered through my mind and get to know more intimately the creatures of my imagination who were to take part in my story. It is this portion of the novelist's activity that is wholly delightful; no labour is attached to it, and no responsibility; the easy, unsought exercise of the creative faculty fills him with exultation, and the world of his invention is so real that it makes the real world somewhat shadowy and he can hardly bring himself to take it seriously. This world of his is so significant and so abundant that he is inclined to postpone and postpone again the day when by setting pen to paper he must break the spell and let his own private and complete world lose itself in the world common to all and sundry. I was looking forward

to a delightful summer shared between my visitors and the exciting persons, nameless as yet, who laughed and loved, who pondered over eternity and discussed the meaning of life in my vagrant fancy.

### §3

I THINK we all enjoyed ourselves. The life we led was simple, and we did pretty much the same thing every day. I am an early riser and have my breakfast at eight, but the rest of the party sauntered downstairs at all hours in their pyjamas and dressing-gowns. When at last everyone was ready we drove down to Villefranche, where the yacht was moored, and went round to a little bay on the other side of Cap Ferrat, where we bathed and lay in the sun till we were as hungry as wolves. We had brought some food with us, but Pino, the Italian sailor, cooked us a great dish of macaroni to take the edge off our appetite. We drank the light red wine called *vin rosé* which I got by the barrel from a place away back in the hills. Then we dawdled and slept till we could bathe again and after tea went back to the house to play tennis. We dined on the terrace among the orange trees, and when the moon was full over the sea, strewing her brilliance on the calm water in a great highway of white light, the scene was so

lovely it took your breath away. When there was a pause in the light chatter and in the laughter, you heard the vociferous croaking of hundreds of little green frogs in the lily ponds down in the garden. After dinner Liza and Vincent and their friends took the car and drove in to Monte Carlo to dance.

Of course we talked a good deal about the possibility of war; it seemed remote. A French friend of mine came down from Paris for a few days; he was a banker; he had business dealings with Germany and he was in close touch with the *Quai d'Orsay*. He told us that the businessmen in Germany were strongly in favour of peace, war would be ruinous to them; after all, there had been a scare in September 1938, France had mobilized and war hadn't come; there had been another scare in March 1939, France had again mobilized, and war had been averted. He assured us that the same thing would happen this time, and we were only too ready to believe him; but this time, he added, there would be a difference: Hitler didn't want war; if we had been firmer at Munich he would have yielded; if the British and French governments had made a stand when he marched into Prague he would have retreated; he had bluffed us twice, but now we were going to call his bluff. And when he saw that we were resolute he would give way as he would have given way before. As a proof of his confidence my friend told us that he had just bought a large block of shares in a Polish oil company.

He went away; another guest came to occupy his room; we continued to bathe and play tennis; the weather remained fine; the new moon appeared one evening when it was hardly yet dark, a pale sickle of light in a pale sky, and we bowed to it three times and three times turned the money in our pockets. The moon waxed. The peaceful days passed one after another. And then they were over. I once saw a waiter carrying an immense pile of plates suddenly trip, and all the plates crashed noisily to the floor; things went wrong with just that unexpected and startling effect. It looked as though Hitler were going to carry his bluff through and, there was no doubt about it, we had got to call it. The radio brought us disquieting news, the Paris *Daily Mail*, a day old, described the situation as critical, and the local paper, which was pro-Italian, was frantic. Then the mayor of my village of St Jean called up to say that the order of mobilization would be posted next day. On the following morning, at breakfast, the cook came into the dining-room and told me that the kitchenmaid, an Italian girl, had disappeared during the night with her belongings. My son-in-law, Vincent, was playing in the tennis tournament at Monte Carlo, which was to begin a few days later, and he went in to have an hour's practice with the professional. A little later, while I was smoking my pipe, Francesco, the footman, came in, with a white face, and said he wanted to go back to Italy that afternoon. His wife stood at the door

to see that he persisted in case I tried to dissuade him.

She was an ill-favoured woman, gaunt and sallow, with a bad temper. She had made me a fearful scene about a fortnight before because she was jealous of the maid. I pointed out to her that the maid was fifty and a good twenty years older than her husband, but she told me that that had nothing to do with it. It only made the vileness of Nina, the maid, and the treachery of this man she had married and the father of her child (he stood there pale and trembling while she stormed) more shameful, and he should not stay another day, not another hour, in this den of iniquity which was my house. She did the laundry and helped with the rooms and made herself generally useful, while Francesco, her husband, was an excellent footman who had been with me for years, and I could spare neither of them when my house was full of guests. I said everything I could to calm her, but nothing served, so I was obliged to make the appeal that I had kept in reserve. Some years before, when she was staying in the village because she was expecting a baby, Francesco came into the room where I was reading and told me that his wife had come up to see him and had been seized with the birth pains. He asked if he could have the car to take her back to her lodging; but this seemed to me very imprudent, so I had her put to bed at once and sent for the doctor. The baby was born an hour later, and she remained in my house till she was able to get

about again. I used to go and see her, and she lay there, her ugly face miraculously transformed so that she looked like a haggard Madonna, and the poor little child, tightly strapped in its swaddling clothes so that it could not move a limb, lay by her side like one of those little babies in an old Italian picture. I reminded her now of this incident and suggested that as I had not deserted her then she could not desert me now. She began to cry, then turned to her husband.

"Scoundrel, will you behave?" she cried.

He could hardly speak, he was so terrified.

"As God is my witness," he answered, crossing himself.

"Come then, you may stay."

She motioned him peremptorily to follow her and went out of the room, but at the door he turned to me and gave me a slight wink. I had a suspicion then that my warm defence of his virtue was not perhaps entirely justified, and I wondered whether it behoved me to tell the maid she must resist the advances of men twenty years younger than herself.

But on this occasion there was nothing to be done, and I agreed that they should go. Then Vincent came back from Monte Carlo. He told me that everyone was getting out as quickly as possible. There wasn't a place to be had on the Blue Train. Cars, crammed with luggage, were already streaming along the road. I had told my guests that there was no immediate danger until the Senegalese, the black troops, appeared on the

roads; Vincent said he had seen them guarding the railway bridge at the entrance to Cap Ferrat. They must have been brought in trucks during the night. We decided that he and Liza had better go, and he went up to pack. I went down to the garage to have his car filled with petrol, and my chauffeur told me that his class was called up and he had to leave to rejoin his regiment next day. It was noon by now, and the gardeners were trooping in for their midday meal. François, the head gardener, was a middle-aged man who had fought in the last war, and he was not affected by the mobilization, but one of the under-gardeners (the other three were Italian) had to go. He was worried because he had lately been married (an inconveniently short time before the birth of a baby) and did not know how his wife was to live on the eight francs a day which was all the government allowed to soldiers' wives. I told him I would give the girl enough to carry on with and sent him away happy to eat his bread and sausage.

When I got back to the house I found that Gerald, my friend and secretary, was come back from Villefranche. He said there was great activity at the port. The Chasseurs Alpins, those brave, sturdy little men who can march in their sloppy, rapid way forty miles a day, had set out at dawn for the frontier, and a regiment of Senegalese had taken their place. The harbourmaster had told him that an order had come through from Toulon that all private yachts were to leave the harbour within twenty-four hours. We

decided to take the *Sara* to Cassis, where there are a number of creeks, up one of which she could lie in safety.

In the agitation of the morning it had slipped my memory that I had asked some people to luncheon, a young English writer and his wife, who were staying at a hotel at St Jean. They suddenly arrived, very gay and debonair; they were enjoying their holiday and had not read a paper for days. They had seen the Senegalese on the road and thought they looked very picturesque. When I told them that war might break out any minute, they would not believe me. It was just a scare like the two preceding ones, and what fools they would feel if they went back to London, losing the rest of that lovely bathing, and nothing happened! I pointed out somewhat tartly that they would feel far bigger fools if their car were requisitioned and, with the trains reserved for troops, they found themselves unable to leave for weeks. This startled them a little, and finally I persuaded them that they had better set out for Paris that afternoon.

#### §4

AN HOUR LATER my house, which had been so lively, was deserted. Gerald and I went into Nice to stock up

with provisions. There had been a run on the shops and not much was left, but we were able to get a dozen tins of sardines and a sufficient supply of canned soup, corned beef, tongue and sliced ham to last at least a couple of weeks. We bought several packets of macaroni and rice and a sack of potatoes. All this we stowed away in the boat. When we got back to the house we found that Ernest, my butler, a Swiss, had been to Nice on his motor-cycle to see his consul, who had told him that Switzerland was mobilizing and he would receive shortly his instructions to return. The chauffeur was leaving the following morning after taking us down to Villefranche to embark. The cook and my remaining maid, Nina the temptress, were in tears. They were both Italians, and I asked them if they would like to go home. They had been with me for many years and had nowhere to go, so they preferred to stay; but they were frightened, for my head gardener had announced that he was going to cut the throat of every Italian on the place as soon as my back was turned. With a sigh I went along to find him and informed him that if the Italians on the property were not treated as they were when I was there, he and I would immediately part company. He was very fierce, and when we separated our relations were strained:

I seem to have mentioned a great many servants, but the house was a large one, and servants in France work less hard than servants in America and they do things that in England they would never consent to do.

It is not so grand as it appears to have a footman, for he does a housemaid's work as well as a footman's; and a butler in France is not like a butler in England who opens the door, waits at table, and sees that the other servants do all the work they can be badgered into doing; in France, besides doing what an English butler does, he keeps the ground floor in order, sweeps and dusts, and waxes the parquet floors. Wages are moderate. I think I paid higher wages than any of my neighbours, and I paid my butler (at the ordinary rate of exchange) five pounds a month and the footman four. I had discovered long ago that the only way to live in a foreign country with comfort is to resign yourself to paying a little more for everything than a native and to submit to a reasonable degree of robbery with a shrug of the shoulders. In France your cook has a tacit right to charge you five per cent more for everything she buys in the market than she has paid for it, and if she does no more than double that you must consider yourself the happy employer of an honest woman.

I had then a lot of servants. Sometimes it filled me with uneasiness that no less than thirteen persons should spend their lives administering to the comfort of one old party. It is true that I paid them with money I earned myself and that I provided them with a livelihood which otherwise they might have found it hard to get, but my conscience somewhat tormented me. I knew that I should be just as happy with a small house

and a couple of servants to look after me. Now, though the imminence of war had scattered seven of my servants, I was still left with two women and four gardeners. I could not discharge them or they would starve.

I have talked rather grandly of the yacht, but she wasn't grand at all. The *Sara* was an old fishing-boat, of forty-five tons, with two masts, into which we had a little time before put a Diesel auxiliary. We had made her as comfortable as possible; there was a saloon in which two persons could sleep, a cabin in which there was one berth, and a passageway between the two in which there was another bunk. There was a bathroom and a bath in which you could lie if you were not more than four feet tall, a kitchen in which two could stand, a refrigerator, a radio, and quarters for the crew. The crew consisted of Pino, a sailor from Capri, a friend of his named Giuseppe from the same island, and a French cabin boy who had been one of my gardeners, but who had been discharged because he would never do any work. He didn't do any work on the *Sara* either, but he was civil, obliging and picturesque. I don't know if you have noticed that the majority of these people I have mentioned were Italian. There were said to be two hundred and fifty thousand of them between Ventimiglia, the Italian frontier, and Marseilles. The French did not like them and resented their presence. But they were better workers than the French. People who employed them found them

loyal, easy to get on with and industrious. They flocked into France because work was hard to get' in Italy and badly paid. One thing the totalitarian states have never done, notwithstanding their high-flown promises, is to increase the welfare of the working-man.

### § 5

IT WAS A LOVELY DAY, with very little wind, and sunny, when we started off, so as soon as we got out of the harbour I put on my bathing-trunks and lay in the sun. I was enjoying the quiet after those harassing days. I didn't quite know what would happen to my house. I had no fear that the Italians would succeed in breaking through the French fortifications; they were very strong, and on our way down to Villefranche that morning we had passed truckloads of soldiers going up to strengthen the garrisons. Everyone knew that the French Army was invincible, and Jean, my chauffeur, had remarked that they would be in Rome in six weeks. I presumed that the French would bring down a good many troops as the mobilization proceeded, and it seemed to me quite possible that they would requisition my house. It was a prospect that filled me with some apprehension, for I knew from the last war that when the military, officers or men, occupy a house, a lot of

damage is done. Not only do they take anything that catches their fancy, but they are apt to do wanton harm. One of their favourite amusements is to fire their revolvers at the pictures. An acquaintance of mine who had a château sixty miles from Paris had it destroyed during the last war and, when he rebuilt it, placed over the entrance a plaque on which was inscribed: "This château was bombarded by the Germans, looted by the French and burnt by the British." But I was disinclined for gloomy thoughts, and as soon as we got well out to sea, opposite Nice, I had a swim in deep water. We were in no great hurry, since we did not propose to go further that day than Ste Maxime, where I had friends with whom, if they were still there, we hoped to dine.

The wind freshened as the day wore on and we were able to sail. I read and slept and smoked. There was a feeling of gentle excitement at the notion of getting away from the danger zone and putting the boat in a creek out of harm's way. The Stars and Stripes floating from her stern ensured her safety. We reached Ste Maxime towards evening and dropped anchor just opposite my friend's house, got into the dinghy and rowed to the landing-stage. She flew the American flag because she belonged to Gerald, an American citizen. The friend we intended to visit was the proprietor and editor of a weekly paper with a great circulation, and we expected to get from him reliable and late news of the crisis. We only just caught him,

for he and his wife were starting for Paris by car and in another ten minutes they would have been gone. But when we arrived they decided to give us dinner and set out early next morning.

I shall call my friend Bouche. He was a Corsican, a man with a bald head, a fat, round, clean-shaven face in which his fine dark eyes flashed intelligently, and a fat, jolly but derisive laugh. He never took any exercise except to shoot at a bottle in the water with his revolver, and he had a flabby, fat body. He had been a deputy, but his election had cost him so much—three million francs, well over twenty thousand pounds—that when the next elections came he did not stand. An attempt had been made to unseat him for bribery and corruption, but by the wit and humour with which he met the charges brought against him he had jockeyed the Chamber into confirming his election. He was married to a woman of fortune and on her money had started a paper which in a very short time had achieved a huge success. He was an unscrupulous but brilliant editor. The literary and artistic sections were very well done. He published excellent translations of my novels and stories. But it was not to these that his success was due. It was due to his intemperate, savage and personal attacks on Freemasons, Jews, communists, socialists and radicals. He had a violence that was truly Corsican; he never forgave an enemy, but on the other hand was a loyal and devoted friend. I have known him intimately for twenty years and have never known him

to hesitate to do his best if I wanted help either for myself or anyone else. He was generous, and if ever I had been in need of money I am convinced that he would have put almost any sum at my disposal, and his hospitality was lavish. He had a cynical effrontery that I could not but find fascinating. At the time of the sanctions he adopted a policy that was violently pro-Italian; his enemies said that he was receiving large sums for this from the Italian government, and I have now little doubt that it was true. I hesitated at that time to believe it, because his paper was making so much money that I did not think he needed more; though I believe now I was wrong, I am still inclined to think that he accepted Italian subsidies (and probably insisted that they should be large) to support a policy he honestly believed in. It would have appealed to his sense of humour to be well paid for doing what he would have done for nothing. In the course of his campaign he attacked England ferociously, so ferociously that my government thought fit to protest to the French government. It occurred to him (quite rightly) that I might take offence at these articles, so he sent me a message to the effect that I was not to be disgruntled, it was only politics, and as soon as things calmed down he would have another article written saying that Great Britain was grand and the English the finest fellows in the world. On one occasion a minister of the government was driven to commit suicide by his vitriolic attacks. This caused a reaction on the part of

the public, and there was general indignation against my friend's conduct. He took the event and its consequences to him personally with characteristic coolness.

"It's not playing the game to commit suicide," he told me with his fat infectious laugh, "it's taking an unfair advantage in a political controversy."

"Has it affected your circulation?" I asked.

"Just for a week or two," he answered, with a shrug of his shoulders; then with a twinkle in his fine eyes: "I'm starting a first-rate serial next week, and that'll put us up again."

He was a gangster who had the gangster's code of honour and the gangster's courage. In the last war he was an airman. When he was in the Chamber of Deputies he had fought a duel and, being the good shot he was, had wounded his adversary in the arm, as he had said beforehand he meant to do. He was very funny at the expense of his fellow deputies, who from then on overwhelmed him with their timorous deference. In the troubles of February 6th, 1934, the Minister of the Interior ordered his arrest, whereupon he called him up and told him where he was to be found, adding that he had twelve of his Corsican friends with him, all armed, and he would resist arrest. No one came. I should add, to complete my description of this strange man, that he was a devout Catholic, an affectionate and intelligent father, a considerate husband and a dutiful son. He had so identified himself with his wretched paper that its

success was his personal success too; his one aim was to get on, and to do this he was prepared to stick at nothing; he liked the power his paper gave him, and he got a malicious pleasure out of the flatteries people paid him to his face when he knew that behind his back they hadn't a good word to say for him. He enjoyed going to houses where he knew he was only received because he was feared, and he was unsparing in his contempt of the sycophants who courted him. He had a quick, ironical wit, and he was a wonderful raconteur of droll, bitter stories. I expect to live to see the day when he will be put against a prison wall one cold morning and shot by a firing squad. I ask myself whether if he appealed to me to save him in such a case I would do so. I am convinced that if I were in a similar position he would move heaven and earth to get me out of it.

Looking back and remembering Freud, I have a notion that Bouche's pleasure at seeing me and eagerness to postpone his journey when he was all set to start were due to a subconscious unwillingness to return to Paris and face the difficulties of the situation. While we waited for dinner, drinking cocktails—an innovation from America which he had adopted with considerable enthusiasm—he told me that he looked upon war as inevitable and had already taken premises in a provincial town to run and print his paper away from the bombardment of Paris, which he expected to follow immediately upon the outbreak of hostilities.

The thought of war exasperated him, and that Great Britain and France should resort to it on account of Poland seemed to him grotesque.

"Why should we care about Poland?" he asked. "The Poles have always been worthless people, and the Russians would have beaten them years ago if the French had not had the idiotic notion of sending Weygand to get them out of the mess they had got themselves into."

I reminded him that we had contracted to help them.

"What is a contract?" he asked. "It is an agreement to which two parties affix their signatures to affirm that, at the time of signing, it is to their mutual interest, so long as the conditions are the same, to adhere to certain clauses. But when conditions change and it is no longer to their interest to adhere to the clauses, the contract ceases to have any validity. That is the way business is conducted by individuals, and there is no reason why it should be conducted any differently by states."

Dinner was announced and we drank *champagne rosé*, which is to ordinary champagne what a peach is to an apricot. We left early because the wind was freshening and we wanted to take the boat to a safer anchorage than the open roadstead in which she lay. We spent the night in the little harbour of Ste Maxime and next day at dawn set out again on our journey.

## §6

THE SKY WAS CLOUDLESS, but a stiff breeze was blowing and the little boat danced about like a colt the first time a snaffle is put in his mouth. We could not hug the coast, because the passage between the mainland and the islands that face Hyères was already mined and prohibited to navigation. We went out to sea in the teeth of the wind. It increased as the day wore on, and the sea was high. As a rule the mistral sinks with the sun, but on this occasion it continued to blow with increasing violence. Night fell. The lights on the islands had been extinguished, and we had to steer by the compass. At intervals I went on deck to have a smoke and a chat with Pino, who was at the tiller.

He was between thirty-five and forty, a little man but very wiry, with a flat, deeply wrinkled face, a large mouth and shrewd, twinkling eyes. He was a very good sailor. He had sailed the Mediterranean all his life and knew all its fickle moods and all its guile. He was a man of few words but of a wonderful eloquence of gesture. With a bend of the head, a twitch of the shoulder, a turn of the elbow, a wave of the hand he could conduct a conversation, lucid, sensible and humorous, which was as plain as any that most men express with words. I asked him what he was proposing to do if Italy entered the war.

"Nothing," he said silently.

"But if she does you'll be interned."

"What then?" he motioned. He spoke. "I'd rather be interned in France than fight in Italy."

"You don't want to fight?"

"Who wants to fight? Not the Italians."

"You don't much like the Germans, do you?" I asked.

"Pigs," he answered.

The dawn brought no relief in the wind. Even the captain of an Atlantic liner who won't acknowledge that it's more than half a gale when his huge vessel is bobbing about like a cork would have been obliged to admit that it was dirty weather; green seas were washing over the deck and, below, everything that was movable was being tossed about; you had to cling to your cup of coffee with one hand while you tried to butter your bread with the other; the *Sara* was a grand sea boat and she rode the waves gallantly; one was safe enough, but no one could say it was comfortable, and we decided to run for shelter. We examined the chart and finding what looked like a little bay in the lee of the wind, thought we had better make for that. We changed our course and with the wind abeam made better time. We ploughed through the angry sea for three or four hours more and then, turning a rugged, rocky cape, found ourselves in water as flat as a pond. The cove was surrounded by green hills, on the top of one of which was a small fortress. Umbrella pines grew down to the seaweed which fringed the beach, and

among them a few shabby little houses shyly hid themselves. After we had had a shave and a bathe we went ashore and, finding a general store, bought bread and a newspaper. We met a fisherman who had just caught a handsome fish, and this we bought from him. It would have been hard to find a more beautiful and a more sequestered spot. It was enchanting to lounge away the day there, sleeping, for we had none of us had much sleep the night before, bathing, playing patience and reading. Our meals had been scrappy while we were battling with the storm, and it was very good to have a great plate of spaghetti for luncheon and a fresh fish for dinner.

We stayed there two days. It seemed infinitely remote. It was a place to which you felt two lovers might have fled who wanted to hide their love from the world. No one would have thought of looking for them there. Peace. I never knew a place in which it so seemed a part of the air you breathed. The air was light and warm, the sea was limpid and the night serene and starlit. There was never any noise there; the only people we saw besides two or three fishermen were some Russians who lived in a fisherman's cottage, but at night the silence was so intense that except for the restless searchlight of the fort you might have conceived yourself alone in the immaterial world of abstract thought.

But we could not linger. We had to pass by Toulon, and if war were declared before we got by, it was

possible that we should be turned back; so early on the third morning we set out. There was still a heavy sea running, and it took us a couple of hours to beat up against the wind in order to pass a headland notorious for its confused waters. We came in sight of Toulon, keeping well out for fear of mines, and a boat hurried out to have a look at us, but apparently the Stars and Stripes waving in the breeze allayed suspicion and it chugged away without a hail. I think you need a peculiar temperament to enjoy being tossed about hour after hour in a small boat. I have not got it. We didn't know exactly where we were going; we knew that the secluded creeks we were looking for were beyond Cassis, but that was all we knew; and the chart showed several places along the coast on the way there that seemed to offer as safe an anchorage. We could see them through the glasses, little seaside resorts that looked gay and friendly from the sea; and the *Mediterranean Pilot*, that book published by the British Admiralty which is indispensable to all persons who haven't the sense to stay on dry land, stated that Bandol had a good harbour. I could think of no reason why we should not go there, and when we came abreast of it proposed that we should. My companion and Pino gave me to understand that for seamen like themselves it was just the thing they liked, to bump about in a stormy sea, and they repeated that the good old boat could stand far worse than that (hadn't she twice crossed the Atlantic? If she had it must have been a hell of a

journey, but though I had often told visitors the same thing myself, I never quite believed it), but they accepted my suggestion with more alacrity than I had anticipated. Two hours later we entered the harbour. It was protected on one side by low hills and on the other by a spit of land from which a substantial break-water had been built to face the quay. Here we found so many yachts moored, sailing-boats and motor-boats, that we had difficulty in finding a vacant berth where we could tie up.

## §7

I HAD NEVER BEEN to Bandol. It is a seaside resort, but not a smart one like Cannes or Antibes, nor a gay one like St Tropez, where the artistic young, (and the not-so-young), English and American, go in summer to dress themselves in gay colours, wear enormous hats and sit about to all hours in stuffy night clubs under the harmless delusion that they are being bohemian. Bandol is neither fashionable nor artistic and, so far as I could hear, the only person of notoriety who lived there was Mistinguett. The barber who shaved me told with pride that her legs were insured for a million francs. But it is a pretty little place. The crowded yachts, large and small, give it a pleasant, busy aspect;

there are trees on the esplanade, and here in the evening the inhabitants saunter up and down; there is a row of shops facing the harbour, and cafés where people sit drinking in the open air.

Here then we settled down to await events. Before leaving England I had spoken with one or two influential persons about the possibility of my making myself useful if war broke out. During the last one I had been in the Intelligence Service until the tuberculosis I had contracted in Switzerland from exposure had been so aggravated by want of nourishment in Russia that I was no good for anything any more and had to retire to a sanatorium in the North of Scotland. I had had a good deal of experience and hoped that use might be made of it. As a second string I had put myself in touch with the Ministry of Information. I made up my mind to get back to England as soon as it was possible to travel; for the moment all trains were being used to move troops, and the ordinary services were suspended.

The days passed. I got up early in the morning and went ashore, across the esplanade, to buy the paper that had just come in from Marseilles; the cabin boy, whose name was Jo, brought a fresh loaf of bread from the baker's, and I had my *café au lait*; then I smoked my pipe and shaved and washed, after which it was time to go to market. We had made up our minds to hoard our canned goods in case there was a shortage of food and so bought all the fresh provisions we could. The market was a lively, bustling affair. It was held in a square

shaded by plane trees, and the sun shining through the leaves made a pleasant summer pattern of light on the ground. The farmers' wives stood behind the stands on which they had piled their fruit and vegetables, flowers and cheeses, which they had brought in that morning from their farms in the hills. The display of fruit, grapes, peaches, melons, figs, greengages, apricots, pears, was a sight so gay and rich that it made you happy to look at it. The summer visitors had fled with a rush, and prices had fallen sharply, but you had still to go early if you wanted to be well served; and you had to keep your wits about you or the good farmer's wife, with her friendly smile and honest face, would take advantage of your inexperience. Mine was great. When one good woman assured me that she would never sell a cheese to an Englishman and an ally, and therefore entitled to the best, which she couldn't guarantee on her word of honour was a perfect cheese, and I discovered it was mouldy; when another good woman sold me a melon which was as hard as a rock, after vowing on the head of her mother that I should come back next day and tell her I had never eaten a better one in my life —my faith in human nature was sorely shaken. But I learnt. My worst mistake was the spinach. There were five of us to feed, and I bought so much that it almost filled the string bag I carried; I was mortified to find that when it was cooked it shrank to nothing and there was barely enough for two. Fresh eggs were scarce, and you had to buy two or three here and two

or three there. Then there was the meat to get. There was only one butcher, and his shop was crowded so that you had to wait your turn. There was little beef; that, it appeared, was reserved for the military, for they would eat nothing else; but there was plenty of mutton and pork. Pino would not eat mutton, which he described as offal, so that when I bought that because it was all I could get he would put on a martyred expression and say that bread and cheese was quite good enough for the likes of him. I bought chickens with trepidation because I could never tell if that dead, featherless creature was young and tender or old and tough; I tried to pretend I knew what I was doing by poking a timid finger into its breast, but the cold and clammy skin gave me goose flesh.

By the time I had finished my marketing the train that brought the English papers was in. They were four or five days old, but I read them anxiously. Great Britain was getting ready to fight. At noon the Marseilles station gave the latest news. Things were looking black, but the Germans had not yet marched; there was still hope. Then it was cocktail time. The *Sara's* refrigerator had never worked very well, and we should have been in a predicament if there hadn't been an iceman who came round every morning and provided us with a big lump of ice. After that, lunch on deck under the awning and a nap. When I woke I took the dinghy and rowed out to the mouth of the harbour to have a bathe in clean water. I was ready for a

cup of tea when I came back, and then I strolled about watching the men play boule. It is a form of bowls and with belotte the favourite pastime of the French. There were ten or a dozen matches being played on the esplanade, and the players of reputation would be surrounded by a group of spectators. The stakes were a round of drinks. They played with grim concentration, freely giving one another advice, and it would never have occurred to you that the country was on the verge of a terrible disaster. Presently someone would be seen with a paper and there was a rush to the shop in order to get the evening sheet before it was sold out. The radio news came at seven. Then it was time for another cocktail and dinner. Dinner on deck in the balmy night was delicious. On the boats moored on either side of the *Sara* people were dining too, and the light that hung from the boom cut a charming little intimate picture out of the darkness. The yacht next to ours was a little smaller than the *Sara*. The owner was in Paris, and the sailor had his wife and child on board. They made a pleasantly domestic group as they sat on deck eating their simple meal. After dinner I played patience, then took a detective story to bed with me and finished it before I went to sleep.

I think we must have been in Bandol nearly a week when Gerald, who had been ashore on some errand, came on board and told me that the Germans had marched into Poland. I was sun-bathing on deck while I read the *Daily Telegraph*.

"Good," I said.

"No, bad," he answered. "It means war."

"I know."

It was a relief after those anxious days of waiting to have the matter decided. Of course I knew that the war would be terrible. I knew that cities would be bombarded, vast numbers of men killed, and that the countries engaged would be ruined, but I believed in the French Army and the British fleet. I thought the Allies would in all probability win, but in any case could not be beaten. I went to the post office to send a telegram to remind the person to whom I had spoken that I was ready to do anything, however modest, that could be found for me. I was told that telegrams must be censored by the mayor and that in any case private messages were subject to unspecified delay.

### §8

THE DECLARATION OF WAR brought a number of little changes in our daily life on board. A black-out was ordered, and we had to get blue paint and darken the portholes. If a small chink of light showed, we would be sternly hailed from the quay by wardens and told to mask it. We could no longer dine on deck, but had to eat below with the portholes and door carefully

closed. Giusseppe, the second sailor, got the jitters and insisted on going back to Italy, and a few days later the cabin boy produced a letter from his mother bidding him come home at once. This left us with no one but the imperturbable Pino, so we had to do a lot of the work ourselves. Gerald, who is a good cook, took care of our food, I made the beds and swept and tidied, while Pino looked after the deck and the engines and did the washing-up. The English papers ceased to come, and when I had done my marketing, instead of reading them, I shelled peas or peeled potatoes. The bureaucracy got busy and issued orders regulating the position of foreigners. We had to get photographs and fill up forms which were signed by the mayor. We were forbidden to leave the department of the Var and could only go to Toulon or Marseilles by getting a safe-conduct, which took at least three days to obtain. The casino was transformed into a hospital. Men went away every day. The sailor on the boat next to ours packed his wife and child off and left for Toulon to join a destroyer. There was only a lanky youth in the barber's shop. The bars, the cafés lost their staffs, and soon there was no one in Bandol but women, boys and old men. The boys and the old men continued to play boule. There is nothing so woebegone as a seaside resort out of season, and now Bandol, which at first had seemed a bright little place, assumed a melancholy aspect. But its melancholy wasn't only the normal one of winter; there was something peculiar about

it, and strangely depressing; it was as though a death wind had passed over the town and those who survived went about with fear in their hearts, astonished that they were still alive and not quite sure of it. The people of the Midi are boastful, and everyone you met was full of the defeats that were going to be inflicted on the Axis, but the boys were glad they were too young to fight and the old men said they had fought in the last war and that was enough. There was resignation but little enthusiasm. They were angry with the Poles because they were not putting up a greater resistance.

### §9

ONE DAY a young Englishman came to me from Sanary. Sanary is a place not far from Bandol in which a number of painters and writers have settled; Leon Feuchtwanger lived there, and at one time Aldous Huxley also. The young man introduced himself and said he had come to ask my advice on what he should do. He had lived in Sanary for some years.

"It's awfully difficult to get to England just now," he said. "The trains are simply packed."

Only one passenger train a day was running to Paris, and there were crowds at all the stations. There was

a rush when it came in. People squeezed themselves into carriages so tight that no one could move. They sat on the floor and stood in the corridors. Stories had reached me of travellers who had waited three days at a station before they were able to get on the train. The journey, which normally took fourteen hours, now took nearly thirty, and many passengers had to stand the whole time. The restaurant cars had been taken off, and if you wanted to eat you had to take your food with you. There was a frenzied rush to get away. There was no particular reason for this, since it was inconceivable that the Italians should break through—they hadn't even declared war; but everyone was seized with a panic desire to get back to his own home.

"I don't know what I should do if I went to England," the young man said.

I could not but guess why he had come to see me; he wanted me to say that his best course was to stay quietly where he was. He was of an age to join up. But it has always seemed to me that if you are yourself long past the military age you put yourself in no very comfortable position when you tell someone else to go and fight.

"I'm not sure if you'd find it very pleasant staying on here. You see, every able-bodied man is mobilized in this country. I don't suppose they'll be very nice to you."

"Some of them have been rather disagreeable already. In the café I generally go to they make themselves a bit

offensive, but I don't really care, you know. The only thing that bothers me is whether I shall be able to get any money."

It occurred to me that he had come to ask me to lend him some, but I did him an injustice.

"You know, it's quite likely to last a long time, this war. You wouldn't much like to stay in Sanary for four or five years, would you?"

"I wouldn't mind. I've got used to the place. I'd rather do that than fight. If I went back to England, d'you think they'd make me go into the army?"

"I don't know. I don't suppose just yet. How old are you?"

"If I thought I could get a job in the Ministry of Information or something like that, I wouldn't mind going. But I'm not going to fight. Nothing will induce me to fight. I'm a coward."

I had never heard anyone say that before. It gave me quite a turn and I didn't know what to say.

"I don't want to be a coward. I just am. There's nothing I can do about it."

He had rather fine eyes, and there was an odd expression in them. I could not quite fathom it. I felt I must say something.

"In that case I don't think you'd be much use as a soldier."

"I shouldn't be a damned bit of use."

There didn't seem to be anything further to say.

"What about a dry Martini?" I asked.

"I wouldn't say no," he smiled.

His smile was attractive.

He came to see me again a few days later. It appeared that the German exiles residing on the Riviera had been interned. Those in the immediate neighbourhood had been taken to Toulon, where they had been lodged in an empty garage; there was nothing for them to sleep on but the floor, there was an inadequate supply of water, food was scanty and though at first they had been allowed to receive provisions from outside, this privilege had been quickly withdrawn; they were allowed neither to write nor to receive letters, and they could only see their friends for a few minutes and under the watchful eye of a guard. They were herded like cattle, and they had to put up with a good deal of abuse from the men in charge of them. My visitor was highly indignant that such treatment should be meted out to persons who had fled their country to escape the concentration camps of the Nazis. I could not altogether share his indignation. It was well known that there were Nazi agents among the exiles, and it would have been imprudent to leave men at liberty on the strength of their assurance that they were opposed to the regime of Hitler. It was unfortunate that they should suffer discomfort, but their internment had had to be effected in a hurry, the authorities had put them in the only place that was at the moment available, and it was certain that they were not subjected to ill treatment. These men had found safety in France and

had enjoyed the nation's hospitality; it seemed to me that now was their opportunity to show their gratitude by accepting with equanimity the mischance that had befallen them. The times were critical, and I did not think there was any reason for them to harbour bitterness towards the French, if for the security of the state they had thought fit to treat them as possible enemies. The rain, as we know, has a way of falling on the just and on the unjust alike.

But these reflections were too sensible to appeal to my friend and, all his humanitarian sentiments outraged, he inveighed with vehemence against the stupidity, highhandedness and brutality of the French. Among the prisoners was Leon Feuchtwanger, the author of *Jew Süss*, and my friend brought me a letter from his wife asking me if I could do anything to effect his release. Feuchtwanger was a man of over fifty and so violent an enemy of the Nazis that his German nationality had been taken away from him. It seemed absurd to place him under restraint. I happened to have a slight acquaintance with Jean Giraudoux, one of the most distinguished of French writers as well as an official at the Quai d'Orsay, who had been put at the head of the Bureau of Information in Paris. I sent him a long telegram, and followed it with a letter, in which I put Feuchtwanger's case before him and pointed out the danger of antagonizing the German refugees who on their return to their own country after the war would have power to influence opinion. I do not

know whether my intervention had any effect, but I heard from Feuchtwanger not so very long afterwards that he had been released.

The weeks dragged on. The weather changed and bathing ceased to be a pleasure and became nothing but a spiritual exercise, and instead of rowing out to the mouth of the harbour I contented myself with diving off the deck of the *Sara* and a rapid swim. Bandol had the perplexed and ravaged look of an actress whom the fickle public has forgotten. The bartender at the bar where I went in to have a drink now and then came aboard one night to say good-bye, as he was leaving at dawn.

"Are you glad to go?" I asked him.

"I'm not sorry, business is rotten, and I shan't have to fight. I'm thirty-six and I'm pretty sure I can wangle an easy job where there's nothing to do."

One day was exactly like another. It became intolerable. We decided to go home. But we discovered that new regulations had come into force, and it looked as though weeks must pass before we could get the necessary permissions to leave Bandol, to pass through the strictly guarded military zone of Toulon and to go from one department to another. There were police at the station at Bandol who examined your papers before they let you get on the train; police came on the train at Toulon and Nice and, if your papers were not in order, marched you off to the police station. There seemed nothing to do; but having once

made up our minds to go, we could not bear to stay, so we determined to take a risk. There is an old story of a prisoner who spent years excavating a tunnel to escape and was foiled, then had the bright idea of trying the handle of his cell door; it turned and he walked out into the street. That is very much like what happened to us. Leaving the yacht in charge of a local sailor, we stepped into a rickety old taxi and told the somewhat astonished driver that we wanted to go to Cap Ferrat. At the boundary of Bandol there was a guard of middle-aged reservists, looking singularly ill at ease in their badly fitting uniforms, who gave us a glance but did not stop us; we drove through Toulon, and neither on going in nor on going out did the guard take any notice of us; we passed from one department to another, which was strictly forbidden, with neither let nor hindrance, and just as night fell reached home. Notwithstanding the severe regulations it was as easy as that.

## § 10

I HAD LEFT two maids in the house, but since we had not been able to let them know we were coming they did not expect us, and the house looked forlorn. There were no flowers in the living-room; it looked cheerless

and faintly hostile. It is strange how quickly a house can lose its friendliness; the furniture, the pictures, the books even, had already the air of belonging to nobody, as though they waited with a forbidding indifference to be distributed under the auctioneer's hammer. The cook set to to prepare a scrappy meal, and I looked through the pile of letters, magazines and books that had arrived during my absence. Among the letters I found one from the Ministry of Information telling me that my name had been put before the Minister, who was of opinion that my services would be useful, so I was requested to hold myself at the Ministry's disposal and not accept any other work without giving notice of my intention to do so. This raised my spirits, for it looked as though I were at last going to be given something to do. I went on reading my correspondence, and suddenly there was a mad rush and Erda jumped into my lap. I suppose she had been out on private business of her own and only that moment discovered I was back.

There were several dachshunds about the house, never less than four, but when a new litter appeared and until the puppies were old enough to be given away, as many sometimes as ten. They had started years before with a very elegant tawny young thing who was called Elsa after the exasperating heroine of *Lohengrin*, and all her descendants had received Wagnerian names. Elsa was now a dowager and should have been sedate; she was indeed in demeour, but

youthful fires still burnt in her as, alas, they too often do in the female of the human species when age has too obviously withered her infinite variety, and at certain seasons it was difficult to make her see that, having produced so large a progeny, it was fitting now to call it a day. So many children and grandchildren had she had that it became more and more difficult to find proper names, and Erda was given hers because we could think of no other. She was black and tan, very small, with a beautiful head, but with a thickset body which she had inherited from her father, who belonged to an arch-deacon, and whose figure, notwithstanding his irreproachable pedigree, had acquired from his connection with the Church of England a rather pompous stolidity. Erda was one of a litter of six and for reasons only known to herself had from a very early age adopted me as her exclusive property. She strongly resented it if I paid any attention to the other dackels and if I persisted would sometimes refuse to have anything to do with me for a couple of days. She insisted on sleeping in my bed, not at the foot of it as a well-behaved dackel ordinarily does, but to my great inconvenience in the middle, and expostulations on my part were vain. She was convinced that this was her rightful place. She followed me like a shadow. When she was about three months old she had come down with me once when I went to bathe. I dived off a rock, and she thought I would certainly be drowned, so she jumped in to save me. But the element was something she had never had

anything to do with before, and she grew frightened; she tried to get out, but the rock was precipitous and she could not climb up it; she was seized with panic and, when I caught hold of her, in her alarm struggled violently. I had some little difficulty in getting her on dry land. Ever after that she would come down part of the way with me, but when she saw what my intention was, would stop and bark at me once or twice to warn me of the danger and scamper off home as fast as she could go. It was quite clear what her thoughts were: if that fool likes to go and drown himself, I for one am not going to be there to see it.

When Erda saw bags and trunks brought down and realized that I was going away, she would wander about miserably and sulk; but when I came back again her joy was tumultuous. She would rush madly about the room, jump on me and throw herself on her back to have her belly rubbed; but then suddenly the notion seized her that I had been terribly unkind to leave her and she would begin sobbing. It was really dreadfully moving and made me feel a selfish brute. She had never loved anyone but me. At appropriate seasons marriages had been arranged for her with husbands of exquisite beauty and the most aristocratic ancestry, but she invariably met their advances with such violent hostility that even the most ardent suitor was discouraged. You may say that her tastes were vulgar and that she would not have remained indifferent to the persuasions of a low-born swain. You would do her an

injustice. Mastiffs, schnauzers, alsatians, poodles, terriers, she spurned them all and, like Henry VIII's great daughter, the Virgin Queen, was settled to a celibate life.

## § 11

CAP FERRAT was never so densely populated as most parts of the Riviera. Much of it had at one time belonged to Leopold I, King of the Belgians, and when the property was sold at his death it was in lots of some extent. I owned about twelve acres. A considerable part of the cape was still as wild as the country must have been before the English discovered that it had the best climate in Europe. Now it was deserted. Nearly all the villas were closed, and I could walk for an hour without meeting a soul. One afternoon I caught up with a youth whom I had known since he was a ball-boy at the tennis courts belonging to a Beaulieu hotel. His name was Nino, and he made a precarious living by doing odd jobs round the harbour at Villefranche. This had not prevented him from marrying and begetting a couple of children. He was a thin, lanky boy, and he was walking in a lackadaisical manner. I asked him what he was doing now and he said, nothing, there was no work to be got anywhere. I wondered why he was

not in uniform. He told me that he had been rejected; he had been taking medicine and eating as little as possible in order to get himself in such a physical condition that the army doctors would declare him unfit to serve; but he had to be careful, they might want to examine him again and he couldn't afford to take risks.

"I'm hoping they'll say I'm tuberculous," he told me.

"Would you rather have tubercle than defend your country?" I asked.

"Every time."

"Your best friend couldn't describe you as patriotic, could he?"

"Patriotism—what bunk! [*Quel blague!*] Patriotism is for the rich."

Since my departure there had been some military activity on the cape. At one end of the road that ran below my house there was now a small camp, and they had an anti-aircraft battery there. Guns, hidden among the trees, had been placed on the cliffs. They had another battery on the football field near the Duke of Connaught's house, and this they had surrounded with barbed wire. Nearly opposite this was a friendly little café frequented by the sailors from the semaphore on the top of my hill, and the soldiers when they were off duty. They played belotte and danced in the evening to a gramophone. It was the only place on the cape where there was any life, and now and then I used to

go there. I knew some of the sailors, because my garden offered them a short cut to the high road, and several of the soldiers, because they had discovered that when they were short of wine a couple of bottles could generally be got at my house. They made no secret of the fact that they were pleased to be in a spot where there was no likelihood of their ever being called on to fight. The sailors were very frank.

"After all, this isn't our war," they said, "it's the war of you rich people. It has nothing to do with us."

I thought this was no more than the annoyance natural to men who had been snatched away from their normal occupations and paid no great attention to it. I was wrong. I remember saying something about the treaties that France and Britain had signed with Poland, but my remarks were received with derision.

"Who cares for treaties? Hitler isn't such a fool as to bother about them. When they don't suit his convenience he ignores them."

The sailor who said this put it, however, in a form too scatological for me to translate his words with accuracy. There happened to be present on this occasion a sergeant who in private life was a tailor.

"But there's the honour of France to take into consideration."

The sailor answered with the dirtiest word in common use in French conversation. The others laughed. The sailor went on:

"There's only one war I'm prepared to fight in, and I'll fight that all right. That's the war of the poor against the rich, and one of these days that war's coming."

### § 12

MEANWHILE I went on with a job of work I had on hand. I hadn't the heart to write fiction, and I was expecting any day to receive my summons to England. But I was engaged in preparing an anthology of the various things I had said in my books on reading and writing. It was a mechanical and not very interesting task, but it took my mind off the war. The golf links on the other side of Nice were still open, but soldiers were encamped there, and I felt it somewhat indecent to go and play a game under the eyes of men who were resentfully under arms; so for exercise I took long and solitary walks. I had noticed that the letter I had had from the Ministry of Information had taken three weeks to reach me and in my answer had suggested that instructions should be sent me by telephone or telegraph. No private person was allowed to use the long-distance telephone, but I knew that a government office could do so. It appeared, however, that those useful methods of communication were not at that time

known to the Ministry, and it was several weeks before I received a reply. In this I was asked to write a series of articles about France in wartime and the French war effort; and I was asked further to make what inquiries I could into the attitude of the French towards their British allies. So far as this was concerned I knew already that I should have little to say that would please. Shortly before, Mr. Hore-Belisha, then Secretary of State for War, had made a speech in which he congratulated himself on having landed 150,000 British troops in France without mishap. The French had been under the impression that there were already at least 300,000 British in France, and Mr. Hore-Belisha's statement filled them with consternation. I had been asked then to make a private report of the state of mind in France; I could of course only speak of the region I knew, but in my report I hazarded the opinion that what I said of my own district would be found true of the rest of France also. The French were disgruntled for other reasons besides. They thought the British were not taking the war seriously enough, and it exasperated them to think that whereas all men between twenty and forty-five were mobilized in France, Britain was only training youths in the early twenties. The war was only a few weeks old, but already the spiteful were saying that the British were prepared to fight to the last Frenchman.

I did not much fancy the job that was assigned to me, for I had kept on hoping that I should be asked to do

something which did not involve writing, but there was no help for it, and I at once set about making my arrangements. It was absurd to try to write the suggested articles without much more information than I then had, but fortunately I had an intimate friend in the Bureau of Information in Paris. I telegraphed to him asking for his help. He was an energetic man, and on receipt of my telegram he called me on the telephone and told me that if I would come up to Paris at once he would put me in the way of getting the material I needed. Next morning I arrived. I had been used to stay at the Hôtel de France et Choiseul, a pleasantly old-fashioned inn still furnished with furniture bought under the first Empire, which I liked because it had something of the atmosphere of a Balzac novel, but this was closed since the directors and most of the staff were mobilized, and I went to the adjacent Hôtel Vendôme. In the afternoon my friend took me to the Hôtel Continental, which had been requisitioned by the Bureau of Information. It was like a rabbit warren. An enormous number of persons had found occupation there. I was introduced to a number of ex-ambassadors, dignified and busy but I fancied somewhat at a loss in those unaccustomed surroundings, to several young men of title who, a censorious person might have thought, would have been more in place at the front, and to a good many professors. The French have always had a great and laudable respect for letters; Jean Giraudoux, the head of the Bureau, was a literary

man of distinction, as well as a diplomatist, and on the face of it you would have said it was a good plan to put the censorship and dissemination of news in the hands of writers of eminence. It proved a failure. The French love fine phrases, and the distinguished authors who were given the task of speaking over the air gave their listeners plenty; they did not realize that this was no time for them and with their well-balanced sentences and rhetorical platitudes they succeeded only in boring the public. In fact the only speaker who was effective was Daladier, the Premier; he had an earnest simplicity and a way of putting anything he had to say so clearly and so sincerely that he gained great hold over the people of France. To this talent may be ascribed his continuance in power long after it was evident that he was not the man for his responsible position. It is one of the defects of the democratic form of government that a gift for oratory may enable a man to achieve power which his character does not fit him to exercise. My friend had told me over lunch that the Bureau was at sixes and sevens. That horde of personnel was scurrying about without direction, for Jean Giraudoux, an amiable, kindly and clever man, had no gift for organization. Efforts were afoot to displace him, but hitherto he had managed to foil the plots laid against him. Few knew exactly what they were to do. No one could get anything done. It was a hotbed of intrigue. No one was secure in his place, for there was sure to be someone who wanted it either

for himself or for a friend. An active worker would be hampered in his efforts by the jealousy of his colleagues. Influence was paramount.

So far as I was concerned, however, I must state that everything was done to facilitate my mission. My friend had a bustling, persuasive loquacity, and he had prepared the ground. I was introduced to the proper persons and, when I had explained my object, was offered every help. Within an hour it was settled that I should go to the front. The general attached to the Bureau telephoned to the general in command at Nancy, and arrangements were made there and then that I should go there by a certain train on the next day but one, when a staff officer would take charge of me and show me whatever I wished to see. My friend took me then to another office in the building, and there an appointment was made for me to see Dautry, the Minister for Armaments, next morning at nine. I was pleased to be at work at last and delighted to find that I could count on such willing help. Perhaps it will not be thought immodest in me to add that the way was made easy for me not only because the various persons concerned realized that the articles I proposed to write would be useful, but also because my name was well known in France and they had all read and liked my books. The position of the writer in France is very different from what it is in England. In France he is respected and his opinions are thought worth listening to, whereas in England he is regarded with

suspicion and little importance is attached to what he says. In England we keep our esteem for the politician and the man of action. We have an instinctive distrust of ideas.

### § 13

THAT EVENING, feeling that I had done a good day's work, I dined with my energetic friend and a couple of wise, level-headed journalists. My guests were good talkers, and I kept my ears open. They did not think that Daladier would last long as head of the government, but they could not agree who would succeed him. It appeared that he was unable to make a decision. When something had to be done he hesitated and let it stand over in the vain hope that events would settle the matter without his having to intervene. I learnt that Gamelin, the commander in chief, was occupying himself with politics rather than with winning the war, and was holding on to his post against the intrigues of rival generals through his personal friendship with Daladier. I learnt that the army and the people had confidence in General Georges, Gamelin's chief of staff, but that the two generals were barely on speaking terms with one another. When I got the chance I introduced the subject that was of interest to me,

namely, how the French looked upon the British effort and how the population and the army were getting on with the B.E.F. I was to ask these questions many times before I got home again; I got pretty much the same answers, and I shall give here the result of my inquiry which I subsequently put into a private report. The impression I received was that there was widespread dissatisfaction with the inadequacy of British support and with the behaviour of British troops, and that such cordiality as the French thought fit to display to their allies was due to policy rather than to friendliness. They were shocked by the levity of the British. They thought it very silly that they should chalk wisecracks on the troop trains that took them across France, and it was with some sourness that they commented on the good humour that made them sing songs as they marched. Nor had they much patience with the passion the British soldier has for playing games. The French, except those who have come under Anglo-Saxon influence, look upon games as rather childish, and that grown men should play football when the destinies of the world were at stake seemed to them a sign of absurd frivolity. I had to explain over and over again that you had to take the British soldier as he was.

"He's prepared to die for you," I said, "but he'll die with a joke, possibly a very poor one, on his lips."

The Americans think the English have no sense

of humour. They are wrong; it is only that their sense of humour is different. It is quick, but often so coarse that it is difficult to give an example of it. I like the story of the young college man who was driving a bus during the general strike and when he stopped was surrounded by a threatening crowd bent on beating him up. A woman shouted out, "You dirty bastard!" whereupon he replied, with a grin, "Why, Mother, what are you doing here?" The crowd caught the innuendo, burst into a shout of laughter, and let him go.

In this connection I must relate an incident that caused a good deal of ill feeling in France. The French were asking where the British troops were, and several persons, myself included, were pressing the War Office to let the inhabitants of Paris see the regiments that passed through on their way to the front. The normal procedure was for them to arrive in Paris from the port of debarkation, go round the city in the same train, and then proceed to their destination. I suggested that it would hearten the population if instead of doing this they marched through Paris. The authorities did not favour this plan because when they got into the train the men took off their belts and tunics and made themselves comfortable and it would be a trouble to get them again in proper marching kit. The objections were at last overruled, and one fine day the Welsh Guards marched through the boulevards and down the Champs Elysées, but they marched to the Lambeth

Walk and this profoundly upset the population. They thought it very shocking that these men who were going to the line of battle should march to a flippant dance tune.

But the chief cause of ill feeling between the British and the French troops was that the British were better paid; they could buy themselves luxuries that the French soldiers had to do without, and the girls were more inclined to be friendly to men who had money to spend on them than to men who hadn't. A minor cause of dissatisfaction was that the French had to return to their cantonments at half-past eight while the British could stay in the cafés till half-past nine. When the French trooped out, the British subjected them to a lot of chaff, which was not ill-naturedly meant, but which went down very badly with the men who had to put up with it. The British got gay during their last hour and would not seldom finish the evening by smashing all the bottles in the café, so that when the French soldiers went in for their *aperitif* next day there was nothing for them to drink. There was much unfavourable comment on the alcoholism in the British Army, both among officers and men; French officers who were asked to dine at a British mess were shocked to see their hosts get drunk after dinner, and it exasperated them to see them on parade next morning alert, bright-eyed, and pink-cheeked, and as fresh as green leaves in spring. On the other hand the civilians both in the towns and in the country were disposed to like the British troops,

in the towns because they spent their money freely and in the country because they were always glad to give a hand at work on the farm.

Taking it all in all, there was a lot to be done in the direction of improving the feeling between the B.E.F. and the French. I was a person with no authority, and all I could do was to point out what was wrong and make suggestions to put it right.

Next morning I called on Raoul Dautry, the Minister of Armaments, and found an alert, swarthy little man, with a squint, who had already made an elaborate plan for me to visit various factories. Monsieur Dautry was not a politician but an engineer, and he had gained a great reputation by reorganizing the state railways, which had been in a lamentable condition; he was a hard worker, sparing neither his subordinates nor himself, with a great deal of drive, and an honest man. He is the only member of the government whom the collapse of France has left with an untarnished name. The plan he proposed would have taken at least a month to carry out, and I could not afford the time; as always happens in war, no course of action is decided upon in a hurry, but then one is expected to produce results immediately; to get the data for all I was asked to write about, I needed at least three months, and I was only allowed one. It is difficult for a layman as ignorant of these things as I was to write a readable article about armaments, and I knew I could only do it by getting a mass of material to choose from, but I

could not afford to give more than a week to collect it. I explained this to the Minister and left him with the understanding that I would let him know as soon as I returned from the front.

#### §14

THAT AFTERNOON I went to Nancy. A room had been engaged for me at the hotel near the station, the famous hotel in the Place Stanislas being closed; this hotel is in the great square, which is one of the most beautiful squares in Europe. It was built by that Stanislas Leszczynski, for some time King of Poland, who was given Lorraine to console him when he was dispossessed of his kingdom. His daughter married the amorous Louis XV, who said of her after her demise: "She never gave me a moment's displeasure except by dying" (only he put it more epigrammatically). The square, with the vast palace on one side and its gilt gateways and elegant statuary, is a perfect example of rococo architecture, but now its beauty was concealed by heaped-up sandbags. As I entered my modest inn a spruce young officer presented himself and told me he had been ordered to look after me. We went into the adjoining café and, sitting at a marble-topped table, ordered drinks. The officer was a Breton, in private life an

architect, and he spoke English admirably. It was on this account that the general, not knowing that I spoke French, had given him the job. I found him intelligent, cultivated and amiable. I explained to him what I wanted to see and listened to his suggestions. When we had made arrangements for the next couple of days we began to talk of things in general. I was not so anxious to know about what was going on in the battle line—the war correspondents were covering that—as to find out what conditions were in the army, how the peasants were taking the war that was being waged in their midst, and how the German propaganda was affecting the troops. I asked the officer to dinner, and he took me to a restaurant in the town. It was full of officers, some of them in little groups, others alone with a wife or mistress. During dinner he told me a moving story. A British plane on reconnaissance over the German advanced posts was hit and only got above the no-man's-land between the two lines before it crashed. French soldiers managed to get to it and found the pilot unconscious, but alive, and the two other members of the crew dead. They brought the pilot in, and he was taken to the hospital at Nancy. He was badly wounded. When he recovered consciousness the first thing he asked was what had happened to his crew. The doctor told him that they were dead. He raised himself in his bed to a sitting position, brought his hand up to his bandaged head in a salute and said: "Never mind, it's for England."

Next day I started on my tour. I went to the headquarters of General de Lattre, a man of distinguished appearance, with beautiful manners, who looked very elegant in his well-cut uniform, and I had a chat with him. He invited me to dinner so that we could talk at length, and we started off to Strasbourg, where we were to lunch with the mayor. I drove with a staff captain who was to conduct me round Strasbourg. He was a man of about thirty-five, in civil life a novelist of some reputation, and he had got his job because he was a personal friend of Daladier, the Premier. I was told afterwards, I don't know with what truth, that he wrote his speeches for him. During the drive, as writers will when they get together, we talked of books. Enemy planes flew over us at no great height, and I thought he looked up at them with apprehension. Strasbourg had been evacuated; the streets were empty, the shops closed, and there was the stillness of death in that city ordinarily so busy and crowded. The miaowing of deserted and hungry cats cut the silence like a piece of silk suddenly torn in two. There was an air raid while we wandered about, and we saw German planes overhead. The siren in that melancholy city was strangely sinister. My companion gave me a quick, harassed look and said: "Shall we run?" I didn't want to at all, but I thought he would imagine I was putting on airs if I refused, so we trotted down the street in a most undignified manner till we reached a shelter. We arrived somewhat out of breath, and I wondered if my

staff captain felt such a fool as I did when a few minutes later a buxom young woman came strolling in quite leisurely, having very obviously not hurried herself at all to reach the shelter.

I got to know this man fairly well during the three days I was in his charge. He told me that with his influence he could easily have got a safe billet in Paris, but he had insisted on coming to the front, and he told me how impossible he found it to see dead men without horror. He said that his fellow officers assured him that he would get used to it. In war, they said, death is meaningless, and if your friend is killed it doesn't affect you any more than if he were transferred to another sector. It's just part of the game, and you accept it as you accept a bad hand at bridge. He asked me if I had ever seen dead men. I answered that I had been in France at the beginning of the last war, and I told him about an incident that had made a singular impression on me. I forget where I was, but there had been a small battle in which there had been about a thousand casualties, and just outside a hospital I came upon a heap of dead men; they were piled on top of one another like dead sheep, and I had no feeling that they had ever been men, but rather that they were *things*. Then I noticed something that struck me as peculiar: how small their hands were; they were just ordinary soldiers, and yet their hands had the distinction that we erroneously call aristocratic; in a moment it occurred to me that their hands were so elegant because all the blood had been

drained out of them. I asked the captain whether he had made the same observation, but he said he hadn't been able to look at them at all. It filled him with dismay.

I think he must have been thankful to be rid of me; he never ceased to look up at the planes anxiously as they flew over us, and he could not accustom himself to the sound of gunfire; and though he took me dutifully wherever I wanted to go, it was plain that he was nervous all the time. I do not want to pretend that I showed any courage; there was no danger whatever except in his apprehensive fancy. I read a couple of his novels later. They were charming and sensitive, with a lyrical feeling for the countryside in which he was born and bred, a delicate sense of humour and a loving sympathy for the peasant folk he knew so well. They were tender rather than strong. He interested me, and I enjoyed his company. As I made it out, he had got himself sent to the front from patriotism and on an impulse of heroism, and as often happens with writers, had never realized how great a gulf there is between fact and fiction. I think he was just frightened to death, with that fear that forces a man to a shameful garrulity, frightened of planes, of guns, of all the dangers his imagination presented to him; and yet, perhaps for fear of what his friends and brother officers might say, perhaps for fear of his own opinion of himself, would not use the influence he undoubtedly had to get himself removed to a place of safety.

During the next few days I went here and there; I visited the Maginot Line and went over a casemate. The officer in command told me he could hold out for six months if he were besieged; it came as something of a shock to me to see in the paper some months later that this particular fortress had been captured after four days. At one G.H.Q. where I spent the night a number of officers came into my room after dinner with a bottle of mirabelle, and we discussed conditions. I was struck by their alertness and intelligence. They looked forward to the day when they would come to grips with the Germans and were confident that they could thrash them. One evening I dined with General Prételat, who was in command of all the armies in the sector. He had the reputation of being one of the ablest generals in the army, and you could not be with him long without recognizing that he was a man of character. He lived in a rather ugly villa on the outskirts of Nancy which had been requisitioned. Dinner was something of an ordeal. His staff sat down with us—I suppose we were twelve in all—but no one opened his mouth except to put food in it, and the conversation rested entirely between my host and myself. He talked with fluent vivacity; and he was a man who did not mince his words. He was full of confidence. He frequently changed the regiments who were occupying the advanced posts so that during this period of waiting he could accustom them in turn to actual war, and in the skirmishes that were constantly taking place he had

found to his satisfaction that the French soldier was discovering that, man for man, he was more than a match for the German. His chief difficulty was that his troops were eager to attack, and it was hard for him to persuade them that they must have patience till the spring came and forced the Germans to advance. Then they would annihilate them. Of course there was always this to be faced: there was eighty million Germans and only forty million French; the Germans had a hundred and twenty divisions against ninety French; the British must be ready to put into the field thirty divisions. I believe that would be four hundred and fifty thousand men, and that is about what the British had in France when she collapsed. The general went on to say that France had lost a great many men in the last war and could not afford to lose any more. She must be very careful. It did not occur to me then that it must be hard to win a war if you are not prepared to sacrifice men. He spoke of the peace terms that France would impose on a beaten Germany. This was the third time in a century that France had had to repel the German hordes, and every Frenchman was determined that it should be the last. Of course the only reasonable plan was to kill twenty million Germans, but since that was impossible other means must be found to provide France with security. This time, the general said, they would not allow themselves to be defrauded of the fruits of victory as they had been defrauded after the last war by Wilson and Lloyd George. Germany

must be divided once more into a number of small states, and the Rhine must be the frontier of France. I pointed out that this would bring under French rule several million Germans who would be naturally rebellious and discontented; the unrest which often prevailed in Alsace-Lorraine after the French Republic recovered these provinces showed to my mind how hard it was to assimilate an alien population. The general shrugged his shoulders. Of course if there were enough Frenchmen the Germans in those countries could be driven out, but there weren't enough even to populate France, and so the only thing was to keep strong garrisons at the bridgeheads of the Rhine and hold them by force.

After dinner I asked the general if I could see him for a few minutes in private, and he took me into his study. I had learnt during the busy days that I spent with these armies that what very much disturbed the French was that they never saw British soldiers. They knew that further north they were holding a small sector, but they had never set eyes on them, and they were mistrustful. I had learnt also that the French anti-aircraft batteries were inadequate and had not the range to be effective against the German planes. I conceived the idea that it would be a good plan if a number of British anti-aircraft batteries could be placed in suitable positions among the French troops, so that men and officers could get to know one another and so that the German planes would have something to fear. I thought

that the moral effect would be great, but before I put the suggestion into the report I proposed to submit I wanted to know how the French would welcome such an offer. The general was so delighted with it that he asked me if I minded his telling his staff; he called them in, and they too received the proposal with enthusiasm. It was never carried out. I was given to understand that the difficulties of providing the British soldiers with the food, drink and cigarettes they were accustomed to made the scheme impossible.

One thing that occurred to me as I went from place to place was that the men seemed to wander about all day long with nothing much to do. They were worried by their letters from home which told them that their farms and their shops were going to rack and ruin in their absence. They played no games but belotte, a card game for two, three or four persons, which I can only describe as a variation of euchre. It is the favourite game of the working classes and of the small bourgeoisie. They played it for hours on end. They were well fed and they had a ration of wine for the two principal meals of the day. In their idleness they had plenty of time to ponder over the German propaganda. Ferdinand, the traitor of Stuttgart, told them every day that they were being sacrificed to save the fortunes of the capitalists and that while they were at the front the British soldiers at the rear were taking their pleasure with their wives. Now and then a French soldier would have reason to think that this was a fact, and it was easy

to conclude from an isolated instance here and there that the charge was true. Just about the time I was with the armies of Alsace the Germans had been strewing over the French lines a broadsheet called the Bath of Blood. On it were four pictures; the first was of a French and a British soldier standing at the edge of a pool of blood; the second showed them preparing to dive in; in the third you saw the Frenchman take the plunge while the Britisher remained on the bank; and in the fourth the Frenchman was up to his neck in blood while the Britisher strolled away with a grin on his face. It was effective. The only answer to this was the tablets in many French cathedrals in memory of one million soldiers from Britain and the Dominions who lay buried in France after the last war.

But notwithstanding the clever propaganda and the idleness that was sapping their morale, I came away with the impression that when the time came for these armies to fight their battles, with those brilliant and energetic officers to lead them, they could be trusted to acquit themselves valiantly.

### § 15

I SPENT THE FOLLOWING WEEK visiting munition works. Everyone seemed to be working very hard; the hours

indeed were so long, for seven days a week, that I felt bound to ask Monsieur Dautry, the Minister, whether he was certain flesh and blood could stand it. He told me there was no help for it. I think now it was an error. Men can work twelve hours a day for seven days a week for a short spell, but when it comes to month after month the amount and quality of work are reduced and the exhaustion of the workers greatly affects their morale. It was unfortunate that a large number of skilled workmen had been mobilized and were guarding bridges or scrubbing barrack floors when they would have been better occupied in the factories. I had asked that I might be permitted to talk freely to the workmen, and permission to do this was given me with great cordiality. But I was accompanied everywhere by two engineers, one military and one naval, so that they might explain to a person of my limited knowledge whatever was not clear; and they dogged my steps. I might have been a gangster between two cops. The directors of the various factories were highly civil to me, but when I stopped to talk to a workman, the director and the two engineers stopped too, and I could not be so foolish as to suppose he would tell me anything they would not like me to hear. I did, however, hear one or two things I was not meant to. At one factory I heard the director tell one of my companions that over sixty of his workmen had been sent to prison for sabotage or communist propaganda. On another occasion I heard a director say I had better not go to such

and such a factory because the general feeling was bad, and once I was asked outright not to attempt to speak to any workman. The impression I brought away with me was that an immense effort was being made to remedy the lamentable deficiencies in French armaments, and that most of the workmen were collaborating in this with all their power, but that there was a minority, I did not know how formidable, that was discontented or worse. I found that I could get no answers to direct questions that satisfied me, and it was more a feeling I got than convincing evidence that a great many workmen had a fear that the owners were using the war to wrest from them the privileges they had won when the socialist government was in power. I had good reason to know that their misgiving was not unwarranted.

## §16

MY NEXT TASK was to visit the districts in the South-west of France to which the inhabitants of the danger zone in Alsace-Lorraine had been evacuated. When I returned to Paris after doing this I went to the Bureau of Information and said that if I had to write an article of German propaganda the material I had got was admirable, but as that wasn't the object of my tour I

didn't know what I was going to do. They looked down their noses and said, yes, they knew that conditions were none too good. They were in fact disgraceful. These wretched people had been hustled out of their houses at two hours' notice and told to bring with them only what they could carry. They had been put in cattle trucks and had spent three days and sometimes more, in the heat of day, in the cold of night, till they reached Poitiers and Angoulême, where they were distributed in the countryside. Some fell dangerously ill on the way and not a few died. They had been told that all they had to do was to lock their front doors and the troops would guard their houses ; they could rest assured that all they left would be in perfect safety. It was with consternation that they learnt after a few weeks time that their houses had been looted by the soldiers who had been entrusted with their care. The mayor of one town, obliged to go back on business connected with his office, told me that he had found everything taken ; he had a large library and every book was stolen, and since it must have needed a truck to take them all away he could only conclude that officers had had a hand in the looting ; his silver was gone, all his linen, and his pictures had been cut out of their frames. Not unnaturally the refugees were incensed. Many of them wanted to go back to save anything that remained, but the French authorities, unwilling that they should see what had happened, refused to let them go.

They were miserably housed. The rich landowners

and the well-to-do bourgeoisie refused to give them shelter, and the mayors of the various communes were unwilling to requisition the houses of these incredibly ungenerous people for fear that it would lose them votes at the next election. Camille Chautemps, the Minister in charge of the refugees, was too busy, too timid or too indifferent to take a strong line. They were put in broken-down hovels in which you wouldn't have put a pig, in cottages in which the roof leaked, in stables, in abandoned factories, in ruined farms. They were crowded together, often two or three families in a single room, without sanitary conveniences, with no water except from a well that might be three hundred yards away and with no place to cook unless they rigged up a primitive stove for themselves. They suffered from cold, since they had hurried away with only their summer clothes, and, their shoes having worn out, they were forced to tramp the muddy roads in felt slippers. They could not buy wood to render their miserable dwellings rainproof, or make bedsteads for themselves so that they shouldn't have to sleep on the hard floor, because the merchants were holding up their timber, hoping to get better prices for it as the war increased the need. They were the lucky ones who had mattresses. I saw many who slept on straw.

¶ The whole business was a monstrous example of ineptitude, insensibility to suffering and gross selfishness. It showed want of elementary common sense on the part of the government, for the people of Alsace-

Lorraine were none too satisfied with the French administration, and the neglect, the unnecessary hardship they suffered greatly embittered them. I heard more than one say: "If this is how the French are going to treat us, we'd sooner be German." I was determined to write nothing that was untrue, but it would have caused a useless scandal to relate the facts as I saw them, and I should have been hard put to it to write my article except for the courage and the good nature of the refugees themselves. I dwelt lightly on their miseries and spoke chiefly of the ingenuity they showed in making their lives tolerable, their cleanliness and order in those unspeakable surroundings, the excellent meals they prepared on their makeshift stoves, their kindness to one another and the brave determination with which they made the best of their intolerable condition. I came away with a great admiration for those tenacious, industrious, honest and good-humoured people.

During my visit to the refugees I had two small experiences which for different reasons have remained in my memory. One evening after I had been driving all day from place to place I was taken to dine at a château in the middle of a forest. The château and the forest belonged to a French baron with a high-sounding Gascon name. He had an American wife. They had two silent children who came in to dinner in charge of a silent English governess. On the walls of the dining-room were portraits of the baron's ancestors. They were miles from a town and seldom went to Paris. The

baron occupied himself with the management of his forests, and his American wife was busy with good works. The scene, that old château in a wilderness of trees, with the four broad roads that led from it north, west, south and east, so far from the world, was a fit setting for a novel of Balzac's; and the life those two led there, seldom seeing anyone but the peasantry and the forest workers, was active, but strangely apart. The baron was a fine, upstanding man in the forties, who had been wounded in the last war; he had not yet been called up, but thought he well might be. I asked him what would happen to his forests then.

"Oh, I can safely leave them in the care of my wife. She knows just as much about forestry as I do."

She was a nice-looking, plump little woman in the late thirties. She came from some state in the Middle West, but her dress, the way she did her hair, her manner and attitude were French, and I marvelled at the adaptability of the American woman who could so insinuate herself into the habits of an alien land. There were two or three copies of the *Atlantic Monthly* on the drawing-room table, and I had no doubt she read them, for there were a lot of books about and the conversation showed that they were both cultured people, but I had a notion they aroused no nostalgia in her. The pair were happy and they were pleased with their children. Their life was a little idyll; it had the playful, rather sad grace of a fairy story. And now I sometimes wonder

whether the invasion has passed them by and they live in their fine château with that forest stretching interminably around them, or whether rude German soldiers have installed themselves there and are cutting down pell-mell the trees they laid such store by and loved with such an odd and amusing tenderness. The full moon was shining when I drove away, and in its brilliance the broad road cut through the forest was snow-white. Little animals scared by the headlights scampered across to the safety of the shade. I seemed to be driving away from the Castle of the Sleeping Beauty.

My second adventure was droll. I was being driven round the country by a woman who had been doing a great deal, as had a few charitable English and American women, to alleviate the lot of the unfortunate refugees, and latish in the afternoon I remarked that I must think about getting a room in some hotel for the night.

"You needn't bother about that," she said. "I have some distant cousins in this part of the country who'll be glad to put you up. They're very simple provincial people, but they're quite nice, and they'll give you a good dinner."

"That's very kind of them," I said.

She did not volunteer their name, and it did not occur to me to ask it. I gathered from what she said that they were poor relations who lived very modestly, so I was surprised when at nightfall we drove into a town and stopped at a house that in the darkness seemed

quite imposing. We were received by a shortish, fat man with a red, homely face. He was dressed in dark, somewhat ill-fitting clothes and looked the typical French bourgeois. He showed me to a warm and comfortably furnished room, and I was glad to see that there was a bathroom. He told me that dinner was at half-past seven. I took a bath and, as I was very tired, had a nap. At the appointed hour I went downstairs and found my way to a living-room in which a bright fire of logs was blazing. My host was sitting there and he offered me a glass of sherry. I sank into a large armchair.

"Did you find a bottle of brandy in your room?" he asked me.

"I didn't look," I said.

"I always keep a bottle of brandy in every bedroom in the house, even the children's rooms. They never touch it, but I like to know it's there."

I thought this an odd notion, but said nothing. Presently my driver of the day came in with a thin, dark woman to whom I was introduced. She was my host's sister, but I did not catch her name. I gathered from the conversation that my host was a bachelor and that she was staying with him with her two daughters, her husband being mobilized, for the duration of the war. We went in to dinner and found waiting for us two girls of perhaps fourteen and fifteen with a prim governess. We were waited on by an ancient butler and a maid. My host said:

"I've opened for you my last magnum of claret, a Château Larose. 1874."

I had never seen a magnum of claret before, and I was impressed. It was delicious. For a poor relation I thought my host was doing very well. The food was excellent, real French country cooking, copious, slightly on the heavy side perhaps, and very rich, but extremely succulent. One dish was so good that I was forced to remark on it.

"I'm glad you liked that," said my host. "Everything in this house is cooked in brandy."

I began to think it was a very strange house indeed, and I wished I knew who on earth this hospitable person was. We finished dinner and had coffee. Then the butler brought some large glasses and an immense bottle of brandy. I had done myself very well with the claret, I was among strangers, and thought it wise not to take any more alcohol, so when it was offered to me I refused.

"What," cried my host, throwing himself back in his chair, "have you come to spend the night in the house of Martell and you refuse a glass of brandy?"

I had been dining in the house of the greatest brandy merchant in the world.

"And mind you," he added, "this brandy isn't on the market. It's something I keep for my own special consumption."

After that I had to abandon my discretion. The rest of the evening passed quickly while he told me the

romantic story of the way in which brandy was discovered and the two centuries of history of his firm. I left next day with a cordial invitation to return when the war was over.

### §17

MY NEXT JOB was to find out what I could about the special work that women were doing in France during the war, and then what effect the war was having on the outlook of the French on religion. The articles I wrote on these subjects have been widely disseminated, so I need not refer to them any further. I ended my tour with a visit to the French fleet at Toulon. My description of what I saw did not meet with the full approval of French naval officers. I was sorry, because they had given me a cordial reception and I had enjoyed their hospitality. I had not been able to help noticing the slovenliness of the men's appearance, which contrasted in so marked a manner with the trim cleanliness so conspicuous in British and American vessels, and I had been taken aback by something that looked very like lack of discipline. In the British fleet an order is obeyed without question. I spent a short time in a battleship and on one occasion heard quite a little argument between the captain and one of the petty

officers before the latter carried out his superior officer's order. Indeed he did not do so till the captain got quite in a pet about it. But what chiefly vexed the naval men who read my article was some remarks I made about the attitude of the officers towards their calling. I was sure they were intelligent and conscientious, but I received the impression that they went on board as a man goes to his office, with the thought at the back of his mind that he will go home when the day's work is done; and from this hazarded the opinion that the French naval officer did not go to sea from any deep-seated, romantic urge, but adopted it, after weighing the pros and cons of the profession, as he might have adopted the law or medicine. It was a means of livelihood rather than a vocation. The family is the centre of the Frenchman's life, and it seemed to me that the real and passionate concern of these men was not with their ship, but with the home in Brest or Toulon where their wives and children were waiting for them. I think the event has shown that my guess was not far from the truth.

### §18

I GOT HOME just before Christmas and started at once to write my articles. I had been too tired after my

day's work to write them as I went along, and I have not the journalist's gift of turning out copy hot on the acquisition of a story. I find this sort of writing more difficult than fiction. I am hampered by the facts I have to deal with and I need time and reflection to set them in order. I had read in one of the English papers the articles written by a correspondent who had been doing very much the same sort of tour as I, and though I found them superficial and sometimes inaccurate, I could only admire the skill with which he had seized on the salient points and produced a readable and striking column. I sweated blood over these trivial little pieces. Much of my subject matter was dull, and I wanted to make them interesting; I wanted too to be truthful, and yet I was obliged to leave some of the truth unsaid; and for my own sake I wanted to write them as well as I could. Even though they would appear in a newspaper and be forgotten the day after publication, I could not bear the thought of letting something go out that was written in a careless and slovenly fashion. I am a very poor journalist.

While I was writing, a young French aviator came over from a neighbouring airport. He was very despondent. He told me that planes were sent to the aerodrome at which he was stationed to be tested, and a certain number of thousand-franc notes found their way from the pocket of the manufacturer's agent to that of the persons whose duty it was to test them, and then they were passed. Another story of his filled me with

dismay. It appeared that an order had been given in America for five hundred planes a month to be delivered to France, but one small yet essential part was made under the patent of a French manufacturer and he was demanding for its use a royalty of a thousand dollars a plane. This meant that the American makers would have had to accept a loss on the transaction, and so delivery was held up. I heard the sequel to this much later. Two days before the fall of Paris this French manufacturer cabled to the American firm that they could use this patented part for fifty dollars a plane.

When I had finished my articles I despatched them and set out for England, where I was told other work awaited me. The journey from Paris to London by train was at that time intolerable. Normally it takes seven hours, but then you were lucky if you did it in seventeen; you might even get on the boat and be held there all night because a submarine was known to be in the Channel, and I knew two or three persons who had been kept waiting in Boulogne for no less than three days. I had never flown before. It had always seemed to me an unnecessary risk to take when I was in no hurry to reach my destination, but I had long before made up my mind that if it was a matter of urgency I would not hesitate. I determined now for the first time to take to the air. But the weather was so bad when I arrived in Paris that no planes were flying; there had been floods in England and most of the airfields were under water. I took advantage of this.

to see my friends, and while I was there an interesting proposal was made to me. At the end of the last war it was found that no definite plans had been made for a treaty of peace and this had to be improvised upon inadequate data. The French did not want to be caught napping again, and a small committee had been formed under the chairmanship of an able diplomatist who had shown his skill in these matters by drawing up the statutes for the government of Alsace-Lorraine when those provinces were returned to France by the Treaty of Versailles. It was suggested that there should be a representative of the French Foreign Office and a representative of the army and that the British Foreign Office and the British forces should be represented in the same way. I was asked to join the committee and help in the spadework. This entailed the study of past treaties, starting with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, the ethnographical study of populations with a view of eliminating the difficulties of alien minorities, and frequent journeys to Geneva to consult documents and people. It looked like a useful though exceedingly tedious undertaking, but of course I could do nothing without the proper authority. I put the notion before the Minister at the British Embassy, and he thought it important enough to refer it to the Foreign Office in London. The somewhat dry reply that came was to the effect that the government of His Majesty did not much fancy deciding what to do with the bear's skin before the bear was killed.

I found my French friends as confident as ever in the ability of the French Army to crush the German attack when at last it came. Except for this I should have been disquieted by the reports that reached me of the pro-Nazi talk in the salons. The aristocracy hated the republican regime and took small pains to conceal their belief that in the long run they would be better off under Hitler than under a socialist government like Blum's. One great lady was sent for by Sarraut, the Minister of the Interior, and told that she would be put in jail if she did not hold her tongue. The rich bourgeoisie were declaring that France would be ruined if the war lasted too long and if it was to continue for perhaps three or four years Great Britain must be prepared to pay the piper. Leave was frequent during that period of inaction, and I was shocked to hear that some of the younger officers when they came to Paris were saying openly that the war was a great bore and a waste of time, and perhaps it would do no great harm if Hitler took France and organized it and let them lead their own lives in peace and quiet. I heard that Gamelin, the commander in chief, and Georges, his chief of staff, were not on speaking terms and that Daladier was bitterly hostile to Reynaud, who was intriguing against him in order to get the premiership for himself. One story I found diverting. The President, Monsieur Lebrun, arranged to visit Strasbourg, and his projected journey was kept secret. It was known only to the essential persons on his staff, and

even the police who were to escort him to the station were informed only at the last moment. He arrived and was taken to the banks of the Rhine. As he came in sight of the Germans on the other side they hoisted a huge placard on which could be read in immense letters, "Welcome to President Lebrun," and a military band blared out the "Marseillaise."

The weather continued bad, but it was necessary to get the embassy bag over with urgent despatches, and I was told to hold myself in readiness to start at an hour's notice. I was to fly in an R.A.F. plane. I twice went down to the airport at Le Bourget and came back to Paris again. Once I waited in the plane for half an hour before the pilot announced that he could not go up. On the third occasion he said: "Well, I'll start, but I don't know if I shall be able to land." The plane was small and looked very rickety to me. The circumstances were not such as one would have chosen for one's first flight. We flew low so that we might not be mistaken for an enemy, and over the Channel we could not have been more than a hundred feet above the water. I knew that it only took a quarter of an hour to cross it, and was surprised when the time passed and still there was no sight of land; we went on and on over the sea, and I began to think the pilot had changed his mind and we were heading for America. It was more than an hour before we were over England. We circled round an aerodrome, but the pilot, I suppose, received a message that he could not land there, and eventually

we came to ground on a military aerodrome in Sussex. It was bristling with planes. I was given a drink and put on a truck that was going to the nearest town. It was a Sunday and when I got there I found there was no train for two or three hours, and it was a slow train at that, so I hired a car and, after retracing my way twice on account of the floods that made the road impassable, arrived in London cold, tired and hungry, but in time for a late dinner at the Café Royal.

### § 19

I WAS INVITED to two cocktail parties next day. This was my first visit to England since the war, and I was unprepared for the spirit that seemed to prevail. Of course everyone was doing some form of war work, or trying to get some to do, and war was talked about incessantly, but I received the impression that much less than the country's whole energy was being put into its prosecution. As I went about, saw and spoke to people in high station and in low, this impression was confirmed, but when I tentatively mentioned it I was very tartly rebuked. I met cabinet ministers and leaders of the press at luncheon and at dinner parties, and when I wondered that they had the time for social activities was told that they must eat somewhere. The restaurants

were crowded, and at luncheon at the Ritz you saw everyone you knew; the theatres were doing splendid business. The blackout was much more severe in London than in Paris, and there were many complaints that it interfered both with trade and with the amenities of life. Fortunately the taxi drivers had acquired great skill in driving through the darkened streets, and it inconvenienced the patrons of night clubs less than one might have expected.

There was a lot of grumbling with Mr. Chamberlain. I heard many people say that he was grown so conceited that he would listen to no one's advice. The country, I was told, was being ruled by him with Sir John Simon and Sir Samuel Hoare, and Parliament had become a negligible quantity. Any hint of insubordination was ruthlessly crushed by Captain Margesson, the Chief Whip. The more important newspapers blindly supported the Prime Minister. Rebellious spirits in the House of Commons, with a considerable section of the public and the Labour Party, were of opinion that a much greater effort was needed than the cabinet was able to give if the war was to be won, but they could not see how Mr. Chamberlain, strongly entrenched as he was, could be induced to give way to a more vigorous leader until he was driven to it by a disaster either on sea or on land. It was tragic.

During this period I met frequently several members of Mr. Chamberlain's government. I remember one dinner party where we sat long in the dining-room

after the women had left us and no less than three ministers were present. They talked very interestingly on the advantages of a classical education, and two of them showed a knowledge of ancient Greek that filled me with admiration. I never met Mr. Chamberlain, but I met his wife. It was at a large party to which the diplomatic corps and the members of the government had been bidden. In appearance Mrs. Chamberlain suggested a French marquise of the *ancient régime* and at the same time, oddly enough, the White Queen in *Alice*. She was very gracious to me. She gave me to understand that with industry and application I might go far as a writer; she had read one of my books, *The Summing Up*, and very kindly asked me to have tea with her one day in Downing Street so that she could tell me at length what she thought about it; but I was too shy to go.

Mr. Chamberlain is dead now, and on his death the press wrote long eulogies of his character. They were exaggerated. He was a man of mediocre ability who achieved an eminent position because the party to which he belonged had resolutely prevented men of independent talent from emerging from obscurity, and so when a Premier had to be chosen there was no one of outstanding ability to choose. His vanity was great. He surrounded himself with men he could get on with, that is to say with yes-men, and, notwithstanding the wishes of the nation, would not, till he was forced to, admit into his cabinet, whatever their gifts, men who

would not be subservient to him. When it was evident at the beginning of the war that a national government was essential and it was made known to him that the Labour leaders would not serve under him, he would, had he been truly patriotic, have resigned the reins of power. He was so self-complacent that he continued to think himself capable of the task that was entrusted to him; and, as we know, it needed the disaster that had been foretold to enforce his unwilling resignation. I think he will go down to history as a man, sincere no doubt and honest, but muddled by self-conceit, who put his party before his country and by his ineptitude and stubbornness brought it to the verge of ruin.

When I arrived in London a new Minister of Information had been appointed. The previous Minister, Lord Macmillan, a distinguished judge, had resigned owing to the hostile criticism of the public and the press, and Sir John Reith, well known because he had been for several years general director of the British Broadcasting Corporation, was put in his place. When answering a letter from him about my articles I had told him that the French listened to their own radio with mistrust, but were very much inclined to believe that what they heard from England was true, and I ventured to suggest that it was important to maintain this confidence. This could only be done, it seemed to me, by being frank with the public and adhering to the facts. I thought I might very well get a snubbing for my pains, but Sir John Reith with great civility replied that he was in

accord with me and had every intention of doing what he agreed was not only right but wise. Sir John Reith had the reputation of being a great organizer, but ruthless, domineering and puritanical, and his subordinates at the B.B.C. had chafed at what they considered his tyrannical methods and his interference with their private lives. He seemed the right man to put order into the Ministry of Information, which was overstaffed with a large number of people who didn't know what they were expected to do and who were at loggerheads with the journalists who depended on them for the release of news. I was immediately impressed by his businesslike methods; he made an appointment to see me at noon on the day after my arrival in England, and when I went to the desk to have myself announced, as the clock struck twelve I heard a messenger ask if I was there. The clock had barely ceased to strike as I was ushered into the Minister's room.

I already knew Sir John Reith slightly. I found him in a lively state of agitation, for he was that day to take his seat in the House of Commons and make his maiden speech, both as a member and as a minister, before that intimidating body. He was shrewd enough to know that they were all out to gun him if they could. I could not but think that it would have given his underlings at the B.B.C. a lot of satisfaction if they could have seen this huge, dictatorial man, with his rugged countenance, before whom they had with cause trembled, shaking now in apprehension of the ordeal before him. I had

a conversation with him during which we discussed what was the best use that could be made of my services, and then, having to go to Westminster, he sent for the director of one of the departments and put me in his charge.

### §20

DURING THE THREE MONTHS I spent in England I made many visits to the Ministry of Information. There was as much good will as at the Bureau in Paris and almost as much confusion. The personnel was a strange mixture. All manner of people had wangled a job. There were novelists, lawyers, art experts, advertising agents, dons, literary agents; and women whose qualifications I never discovered; some had sought work there because they wanted to do anything they could to help win the war, others because the war had deprived them of their means of livelihood. The profession most scantily represented, it seemed to me, was that of journalism. Journalists were the natural enemies. As I suppose is usual in all government offices, there was a lot of intrigue, and a man had to keep his wits about him to see that his colleague did not manoeuvre himself into his place. Anyone was liable to be fired at a moment's notice, and the insecurity of tenure interfered with the individual's efficiency. The more industrious tried to

prove they were necessary by turning out masses of printed matter which the recipients threw unread into a wastepaper basket; the more astute, having discovered that the best way never to make a mistake is never to do anything, systematically opposed every suggestion that was made to them. One distinguished head of a department in this manner held his position (and a handsome salary) for more than a year. The Ministry of Information was, moreover, greatly hampered in its work, which is to give the public news, by the obstruction of the services. Those in authority at the War Office, the Admiralty and the Air Force could not be made to understand that the public had a right to know what was happening, and they withheld news and refused to allow photographs to be published. The result was that the foreign press was forced to take the circumstantial, though inaccurate, information provided by Germany.

My articles had attracted a good deal of attention, and it was decided to issue them as a sixpenny pamphlet. This came out and, I think to everybody's surprise, certainly to mine, was a success; within two days the first edition of forty thousand was exhausted and within a month a hundred thousand copies were sold. Meanwhile I had been trying to find something to do. They felt at the Ministry that some use ought to be made of me, but no one could suggest what form it should take; I was like a performing dog in a circus whose tricks the public would probably like, but who somehow couldn't

be quite fitted into the programme. I found the waiting tedious, and since I was not in the mood to write stories, cheated my impatience by taking up the study of Edmund Burke's style. I read his principal works and various lives of him. His inconsistent character, with its nobility and pettiness, its vanity, irascibility and charm, was of a kind to interest me, and I thought of writing an elaborate essay on the man and his work, but it was too large an undertaking to embark on just then and I contented myself with composing a short piece on his management of the English language. Then some bright spirit at the Ministry of Information conceived the idea that I should write a series of articles about England similar to those I had written about France. I did not welcome the notion, since it seemed to me that much could only be a repetition of what I had done before, but I was willing to do whatever I was asked, and for me personally it had at least the advantage that such a survey would take me to parts of England I did not know and give me the opportunity of meeting fellow countrymen of mine of a type I had never come in contact with. We set about getting the various permissions that were necessary, but they were not so easy to get as they had been in France. There I had been a distinguished English writer to whom all facilities should be granted; in England I was just another of those damned authors who came round interfering with people's business. The first job assigned to me was to write an article on what was called the little fleet,

trawlers, mine-sweepers, lightships, the small craft whose crews were doing useful and perilous work round the coasts of England; for it was rightfully felt that the attention of the public should be called to the men who day after day were obscurely risking their lives in the service of the country. I am timorous at sea but a good sailor, and though I thought it very likely I should be frightened I knew I would not be seasick, and I looked forward to the adventure. Unfortunately, just as arrangements were finally completed and I was about to start for the port where I was to embark on a trawler, the Germans invaded Norway and the picture changed. The military and naval authorities were much too busy to bother with a civilian getting material for a series of articles.

Finally I was sent over to France to do what suited me better because I was better qualified to do it. I was to write further articles there for an illustrated paper with an immense circulation, and at the same time I was to send private reports upon such matters as it behoved the government to be informed of but with which it was unnecessary to acquaint the public. My relations in France with a good many people in the know and the facility I had for making further connections made me hope that I could do this useful work at least adequately. I returned to Paris by air, but this time in a large passenger plane; but I had not been there a week when the Germans invaded Belgium and Holland, and this scheme too came to nothing.

## §21

I WENT HOME. I expected things to settle down in a few weeks and intended then to return to Paris and get to work. It was very quiet on the Riviera. The weather was beautiful. We received permission to bring the *Sara* back to her old berth at Villefranche. We were not allowed to take her out, but we used to go down and lunch on board and I bathed from the end of the jetty. I had a long strip of garden which had never been of much use, and I thought it was the very place to make a bulb garden, so, since the gardeners had nothing much to do just then, I set them to work on it. My eyes dazzled with the blaze of colour I foresaw, I watched their progress. There was a man at Antibes who sold bulbs, and he came over and we discussed my plan; of course it wouldn't be possible to get tulips from Holland that year, but he could provide me with narcissus and daffodils, clusiana, iris and cilia. I had plenty of arums scattered in various places, and these I proposed to transplant. I gave an order for twenty thousand bulbs. They were to be delivered in September.

The news wasn't too good, but I saw nothing to fear; I had seen the French Army with my own eyes and knew what magnificent troops they were and how intelligent, courageous and patriotic were the officers. The breakthrough at Sedan was puzzling and disappointing, but

when Gamelin was dismissed and Weygand took his place I thought everything would be put right. My friends in Paris wrote that things were serious, but that there was no reason to be frightened; victory was certain. The mail began to come irregularly and the English papers either came several days late or not at all. The capitulation of the Belgian Army, the danger that confronted the British Expeditionary Force on their retreat to the sea and their escape from Dunkirk with the loss of their stores, guns and equipment—to us in the South it was staggering, but it did not destroy our confidence; we had faith in Weygand and were certain he would pull things together. My first inkling that Paris was not to be defended came when I got a letter from the British Embassy enclosing various papers which were being held for me there. Then came the flight of the government to Tours. The German Army marched into Paris. No news came any more either from England or the North of France, but the radio kept on telling us that Weygand was retreating according to plan and at his own good time would launch his counter-offensive and drive the invaders out. We believed it. We thought he would make a stand on the Aisne, on the Somme, on the Loire. The government fled to Bordeaux. No one I saw seemed seriously alarmed; they were all still convinced that the French Army was invincible. The first hint I had that things were desperate was when I heard on the radio that the government was holding cabinet meetings almost con-

tinuously. I said to my friends then: "I believe the French are going to ask for an armistice." They laughed at me.

The end came with startling suddenness. Reynaud resigned and Pétain became head of the government. It was fresh and sunny the morning we listened at the radio to the grave heart-rending speech the old marshal made to the French nation in which he told them that they must sue for peace. The sea, the empty sea, was calm and blue. Tears came into our eyes and rolled down our cheeks. I went down to the gardener's cottage to tell him the dreadful news. He and his wife were sitting at breakfast at a little round table with a checkered oil-cloth. Each had a bowl of *café au lait* and a hunk of bread, and on a dish was a slab of butter and on another some fruit. The gardener pushed his bowl of coffee away from him and hid his face in his hands and wept. His wife, a fat, homely woman of five-and-forty, cried out loud, the tears streaming down her face.

"How shameful!" she moaned. "How shameful!"

The gardener raised his face and it was distorted with grief.

"How shameful!" he gasped. And then he clenched his fists and shouted: "We've been betrayed. We've been sold."

Josephine sobbed broken-heartedly.

"*La pauvre France*," she murmured.

I waited till they were calmer and then made the suggestions that the situation demanded. For all we

knew, the Italians might come in at any moment. François, like all the French on the Riviera, had been very bitter against them, and I had had to speak sharply to him two or three times on account of his behaviour to the Italians, maids and gardeners, on the property. He had not spared his words. The gardeners said nothing when he abused their country and told them that if he had his way he would shoot every Italian on the coast; but I had noted their sullen looks and thought it very probable that short shrift would be shown him if an Italian army marched in. I told him to get into his car with his wife and go up to a little property he had in the hills and wait there to see what happened. The under-gardeners, who lived in the village, had come up for their day's work as usual, and I stood by while he gave them instructions to water the beds while he was away and see that we had vegetables for the house. Then, with his car packed full of such things as he wanted to save, he started off.

I had myself to think of. It seemed very probable that if the Italians occupied the Riviera they would intern British subjects. Goebbels had spoken on the air about a book of mine called *Ashenden* which I had written on my experiences during the last war; I had arranged the facts, making them as dramatic as I knew how, to suit my purpose of producing a work of fiction, but the German propagandist had treated them as the naked truth and had somewhat violently attacked the British for their methods of dealing with espionage,

and by implication myself; so I thought I should fare better at the hands of the Italians than at those of Goebbels' compatriots, but to be put even in an Italian internment camp was not a prospect to look forward to with pleasure. I drove to the British consulate in Nice, where I found a mob of anxious people asking for information. The consul general, a large, loose-limbed, amiable man, without a great deal of energy, notwithstanding the crowd that besieged him maintained his nonchalance. In his lazy, drawling voice he told us that he was expecting at any moment to hear from the British Embassy, which had moved to Bordeaux with the French government, what measures were being devised to get the British subjects out of the country.

I drove back to Cap Ferrat and waited all the afternoon for a message from the consulate. None came, and whenever I tried to call, the line was busy. So about half-past five, tired of waiting and anxious, I went back to Nice. The consul told me that he had that moment received an order from the embassy that all British subjects were to leave. Two colliers, which had just discharged their cargo of coal at Marseilles and were about to start for Bône in Algeria to take on a cargo of iron ore, had been requisitioned and were now at Cannes. We were to be on the quay at eight o'clock next morning, bringing with us a handbag, a blanket and three days' provisions. There were Italian submarines in the Mediterranean, and I asked the consul whether we should have an escort; he said he hoped so but

wasn't certain. Anyhow, it was the last chance of getting away, and if British subjects didn't take it, the government washed its hands of them. The colliers were of less than four thousand tons, but it was hoped that either at Oran (to which we were to go first) or at Gibraltar the Admiralty would be able to send a liner, to take us on. The consul asked me to see the British subjects in my own neighbourhood and give them their instructions. I started off.

Some of them needed a good deal of persuasion. They did not like the notion of leaving their houses, and one or two, who had established themselves on the Riviera for good and had no connections in England, did not know where they could go when they got there. Others quailed before the danger of the journey. When I was asked point-blank what I thought was the likelihood of our reaching England safely, I was obliged to say that I didn't think there was more than a fifty-fifty chance; but I pointed out that if they stayed there was the risk of internment; it would be impossible for them to get money, and there might be a shortage of food. I left them to decide for themselves whether they thought the risk worth taking. I went home. Though I had tried to put the matter fairly when talking to the various persons I had seen, I was aware that I had weighted the scales a little with my own opinion that they had better go. But I was within myself in a state of indecision. I was determined not to allow myself to be interned, I was too old to undergo such an experience, and I was

willing to kill myself rather than be killed by inches in a prison camp. On the other hand it was at least possible that the Italians would allow me to stay in my villa, but I should certainly not be allowed to use the telephone or communicate with my friends, and it might be that I should be confined to my own grounds. The war would be a long one now (of course I did not know that the outside world was predicting the defeat of Britain within a few weeks; the possibility of that never even occurred to me), and I was not prepared to endure the boredom of a useless existence for perhaps three or four years. Rather than that I preferred to slip away from a world from which I could no longer receive entertainment. The activities of the day had tired me, and as I took a last stroll in my garden, which if I went I should in all probability never see again, I asked myself if it was really worth while to take that journey. Ever since I was nearly drowned in Borneo I have had an unreasonable horror of death by drowning: unreasonable, I say, because on that occasion I was so exhausted by the effort of keeping afloat that I wanted nothing more than the rest of death. I felt no fear. I had had a long life, I had done pretty well all the things I wanted to do, and in the few years that remained to me I could look forward only to the gradual falling away of my powers and the gradual decrease of my capacity of enjoyment; I wondered if it was worth while to make a further effort or if it would not be more sensible to call it a day. I had upstairs in my bedroom a little tubc

of sleeping pills which I knew would bring me the release I sought. But on the other hand there was an even chance of getting through, I knew that my death would grieve one or two persons who were fond of me, I had still several books to write, and I did not really want to lose those last few years of my life when I could sit back, having finished my long labour, and for the first time indulge myself without qualms of conscience in the luxury of leisure. I had borne a good deal of pain in my day, and I didn't suppose it took more than a minute or two to drown. I made up my mind the risk was worth taking.

### § 22

WE HAD A HURRIED DINNER during which we discussed plans. We decided that Gerald, an American citizen, should stay and try to save the more precious things in my house. Though I had nothing of great value, I had a good many things that were endeared to me by long association. There was hardly an object that was not connected in my mind with the recollection of happy days in some far-distant country, with my youth, to which the passage of time had given a romantic tinge, or to some curious accident that had enabled me to acquire it. There were pieces of furniture and objects

of art that it was a wrench to part with, but that were too large to move, and in any case, though I had a sentiment about them, they were not irreplaceable; on the other hand I had a collection of pictures that, once scattered, could never be made again. During the last part of the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth there was a fashion in England to have portraits painted of favourite actors in scenes from the plays in which they appeared. A good many artists painted them, but the chief were Zoffany, a Venetian by birth, and a Dutchman called DeWilde. I bought one more than thirty years ago, because I was a dramatist and it was a pleasing picture, and then, hardly meaning to at first, began to collect them. They were little thought of in those days, and I bought them for a pound or thirty shillings each; I bought Zoffany's best theatrical picture, illustrated in the standard work on this painter, for nineteen pounds. It had belonged to Henry Irving and for years hung in the greenroom at the Lyceum Theatre. Though the pieces slowly rose, I continued to buy them when they came into the market until I had about forty oil paintings and as many water colours. There is a very fine collection of these pictures at the Garrick Club in London, but mine was the best collection in private hands. It was impossible even to attempt to save so many pictures, but I chose out the best ones, about a dozen, and arranged with Gerald that he should put them in a safe place.

I had put a lot of work into the anthology of which

I wrote on a previous page, and it was annoying to think that it would be wasted, but it was too bulky to take with me. I did not so much mind, because the work, though tedious, could be done again; on the other hand if I lost the notes I had made during my journey to India I should never be able to write the little book on my experiences which I projected; there were also the notebooks I had kept in a desultory fashion since I was eighteen. I had taken advantage of a few weeks of leisure sometime before to make a selection from these of what seemed to me might interest readers, and I had reduced them to two fat volumes of typescript which I hoped one day to publish. I had then destroyed the notebooks so that if this typescript were lost I could not reconstruct the book. This and the Indian notes Gerald promised to take down to the boat, where we hoped the American flag would serve as a protection. I did not know that American consuls had received instructions from the State Department that if American property were looted or damaged they were not to interfere.

I had to go up to my writing-room to fetch these papers, and my heart was heavy when I took a last look at the table at which for so many years I had passed so many hours of happy activity; I took a last look at the Gauguin which I had bought long ago in Tahiti out of a native hut in the bush; and I took a last look at the shelves which lined the long side of the room. They were packed tight with books. They stared at me with

silent reproach because I was leaving them. I had to choose something to read on my journey. For a moment I could not decide what to take. I had very little room to spare. I chose Plato's *Trial and Death of Socrates*, and Thackeray's *Esmond* and Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*. Both of these novels were long and would take a considerable time to read, and I had read neither for many years.

My writing-room was on the roof. I stepped out, locked the door, and took a last look at the dark sheen of the Mediterranean below me, then went downstairs to my bedroom to pack. It was difficult to know what to put into the one grip I was allowed to have; it seemed to me that linen could be bought anywhere, but that suits had to be made, which took time, so I took only just enough linen to last the journey and stuffed the grip full of suits. It gave me a pang to leave behind a beautiful new tail coat that I had recently had made, but I thought I should never need full dress again; I hesitated about my dinner jacket, but at the last moment decided to put it in. I took a blanket off the bed, and a pillow. When I went into the kitchen to see about my three days' provisions, the cook and Nina, the amorous maid, were dissolved in tears. I had settled to go so suddenly that there was nothing much in the house that was of any use to me. But we found three or four tins of corned beef and a half-dozen of sardines. One of the persons I had been asked to round up was an old English doctor, who had retired to a little house

in the village of St Jean with his wife, and when I went to see him he had told me that with sugar one could sustain life for quite a long time, so I put in the basket three two-pound cartons of lump sugar. I put in a pound of tea, a couple of packets of macaroni, a jar of marmalade and a loaf of bread. Gerald asked me if I wouldn't take a bottle of gin or whisky, but I said I wouldn't need it. I little knew. It never struck any of us that I should want a tin opener, a plate, a knife and fork, a glass and a cup or a towel. So when the basket was packed all these highly necessary things were omitted.

I was ready to start. I had made up my mind it would be better to go to Cannes that night in case the police took it into their heads to close the road next morning, and in any event I preferred not to spend another miserable night in the house. There had been so little preparation for my departure that Erda, my dackel, hadn't noticed that anything unusual was afoot. She had been out in the garden most of the evening, chasing strange cats, and I gave instructions that if the house had to be abandoned she was to be killed. It gave me a lump in my throat. We drove in silence. I was unhappy. Every few miles a lantern was waved at us and we stopped to have our papers examined by a picket of soldiers who were guarding the road. At one of these halts we were asked by a sergeant whether we would give a lift to an Englishwoman who was taking the boat next morning and had no means of getting to

Cannes. Of course we said we would be glad to, and there stepped into the car a girl with a rucksack on her back and a retriever. I offered her a cigarette, and when I struck a match to light it, took a look at her. She was a stockily built young woman, with a prettyish face and a bare head of untidy, fair hair. She was in a state of sullen trepidation. She was the daughter of an English father, now dead, and a Dutch mother whom she had left in the little house they lived in at Cagnes and had only heard an hour before that British subjects were to leave. I told her that I didn't think they would take her dog on board.

"I won't go without him," she said sulkily.

I asked her why she went, and she told me that she was engaged to a young Dutchman and, if she stayed, might not see him for years, but she didn't know where he was; she had an idea somehow of getting to Java, where she had relations. As we approached Cannes I asked her to which hotel she wanted to go, and she told me that she intended to spend the night on the beach. I thought perhaps she couldn't afford to go to a hotel and asked her if she had money. She answered in a very surly fashion:

"I've got enough. Set me down anywhere on the front."

When we arrived she got out without even a "good night" and lumbered away into the darkness of the blackout. I saw her afterwards on board. She had managed to get the dog on and because of that one of

the officers gave up his cabin to her. She walked up and down the deck, in her one dress, with a frown of sullen displeasure on her face. She had brought no food; others fed her; she was penniless; others pressed money into her hands. She took it with an angry shrug. She was informed that her dog would have to go into quarantine when we arrived in England and she would have to pay ten shillings a week for its keep.

"How can I pay ten shillings a week?" she snapped.

Sympathetic women got together and collected enough to pay for the dog. She accepted the gift with resentment. I never saw a girl do quite so well for herself on the strength of a hard-luck story and an ungracious manner.

It was strange to enter the Carlton Hotel, which is the most frequented in Cannes, and find it brilliantly lit and crowded with people. They were in evening clothes, some of them a trifle the worse for liquor, and there was about them an air of hectic, hysterical gaiety which was sinister. They were of all nationalities. Some had decided to stay, some were anxious to get away as soon as they could. Wild rumours flew about. It was said that the Germans would be there in forty-eight hours. Next morning I went down to the quay. The two colliers which were to take us were anchored outside the shallow harbour.

## §23

THERE WAS ALREADY a crowd on the quay. It increased hour by hour, and when at last we were all embarked there were thirteen hundred of us. The Riviera isn't only a sunny place for shady people. The people whose pictures you see in the illustrated papers and whose doings the gossip writers tell you of hadn't come this year, and such as had were long since fled to safety. There were all classes mingled in the dense throng that waited to pass through the customs; for the French, even in that moment of crisis, would not waive the regulations, and we had to pass before the usual stout woman in overalls who marked our scanty luggage with chalk. There were invalids, some so ill, brought straight from the hospital, that they had to be borne on stretchers; but they, poor things, had to be taken back again, none knew to what fate, for it was impossible to get them on the ships or to care for them there. There were numbers of elderly persons, retired soldiers, Indian civilians and their wives, who after many years spent in the service of their country had made their home on the Riviera because the climate was mild and living cheap. There were also a lot of people who had been occupied there in commerce or trade; and they were to be pitied even more than the rest, for they were abandoning flourishing shops or profitable businesses and now, with half a lifetime's work behind

them, were starting off for England with nothing in the world before them. There were old governesses, teachers of English, chauffeurs, butlers, and even a number of young workmen who had been sent over to do a job of engineering for the French government. Their foreman had refused to come because the work was within a few days of completion, and he couldn't square it with his conscience to leave it unfinished.

It was four hours before I got on board, and many did not manage to do this till late in the afternoon. One poor woman died of the heat while waiting. The two ships that were to take us were the *Saltersgate* and the *Ashcrest*. One was just over four thousand tons and the other just under. The crew had spent a couple of days trying to clean them, but the coal dust still lay thick on the iron decks and in every hole and cranny. I was told to go to the first hatch, and the hold below it was to be my living quarters till we reached Gibraltar. We started in the evening and reached Marseilles next day. I slept on deck that night, but it grew very cold by early morning and after that I slept in the hold. The iron deck was uncommon hard. I put my blanket under my greatcoat, but that helped little; I would sleep on one side till I was awaked by the soreness of my hip and then turn over, to be awakened again by the soreness of my other hip; I lay on my back and found that in that position I could not sleep at all. There were seventy-eight of us in the hold. A ladder led down to it, and I could not help reflecting that if there were an accident

few of us would be able to get out. In our ship, the *Saltersgate*, there were five hundred refugees, and in the sister ship, the *Ashcrest*, eight hundred. When we arrived in Marseilles we were instructed by the French authorities to join a French convoy, and after hanging about all day, forbidden to land, we set out for Oran.

The conditions were so strange to most of us that it took us a day or two to find our bearings. One lady, when she came on board, told an officer that of course she wanted to go first class, and another called the steward (there was only one) and asked him to show her where the games deck was.

"It's all over the ship, madam," he replied.

A third, when she discovered that our drinking water came from the ship's pump, remarked with horror that she had never drunk tap water in her life. But these were exceptions. Most of the people made the best of things and did what they could to make themselves as comfortable as possible in circumstances of extreme discomfort. At first there was some disorder, but we dull Britishers are a practical lot and we soon got things straight. Wardens were chosen for each hatch to keep order, see that nobody smoked below or after dark and that the hold was kept reasonably clean. We were short of water, and hours were fixed at which it could be drawn. But little was available for washing, and it required a strong stomach to wash in soapy water that fifty, a hundred people had washed in before, but there was no help for it, your hands and face and clothes

were black with coal dust, and however filthy the water was, one *had* to wash. Most of the men managed to shave, and the women kept at least their faces fairly clean with the creams and lotions of which somehow or other they seemed to have an inexhaustible supply. But we could do nothing about our hands, they were greyed with dirt; and it was no good putting on a clean shirt, because in a couple of hours it looked as if you'd worn it a week. You gave up the unavailing struggle and wore it a week. We just went dirty.

Some of the refugees were destitute and had had no money to buy food; others had had no instructions to bring any, so those of us who had provisions were asked not to come on the ship's stores; but we had none of us brought enough for the long journey it turned out to be, and after three days we were all joining in the queue to receive our rations. We seemed then to spend most of our day lining up. It was exhausting in the hot sun, and the iron decks made the heat almost unendurable. Then food began to grow short, and at last we were reduced to a small piece of bully beef and four sweet biscuits or a bit of gingerbread for our midday and evening meals. It did not seem very much when you had stood nearly an hour to get it. We were hungry, and I heard one lady say feelingly:

"I'll never take a slimming cure again as long as I live."

It was queer to see women queuing up, a plate or an empty can in their grubby hands, with rings on their

fingers and a pearl necklace round their necks; but they wore their jewellery because they had to, there being no other place to put it. There was a great run on empty bottles to take one's ration of water or tea, and an empty jam jar was precious. You used it as a glass, or as a receptacle for food. I learnt to wash myself pretty well all over in a pint of water at the bottom of a pail, but I only had one towel, which a kind lady lent me, and by the end of the week it was as black as your hat.

I have mentioned that one of my neighbours on the coast was a retired doctor, and he was in the ship with me. We knew that the Italians had a number of submarines out, and we were not so foolish as to suppose they would hesitate to torpedo us if they got the chance. We had a lookout man in the crow's-nest day and night, and we had a gun and a gunner. The gunner was a jovial soul who longed for a chance of having a shot at an enemy submarine. There were only boats enough for the normal complement of the crew, which was thirty-eight; there were neither rafts nor life-belts. It was evident that if we were struck nearly all those five hundred refugees would be drowned. I made up my mind that it would be useless to attempt to save myself, so I asked my doctor friend how best to finish quickly.

"Don't struggle," he said. "Open your mouth, and the water pouring into your throat will bring on unconsciousness in less than a minute."

This I made up my mind to do. I thought I could

stand anything for a minute. After we had been out about three days, seeing nothing but an occasional school of porpoises, submarines were signalled and an escorting destroyer dropped depth charges. The passengers crowded to the side. They were more interested than scared. After it was all over, I saw a lady pass with a small bundle of wet garments and asked her what she had there.

"Well," she said jauntily, "I took advantage of the fuss to get a little water and wash my dirty linen."

The destroyer circled about for an hour, but there was no further sign of the submarine. Our sister ship, the *Ashcrest*, was less fortunate. She developed engine trouble and had to go back to a French port. There she was able to get provisions, but having repaired the engine, had to set out again without protection. She sighted an Italian submarine close at hand, but she was in Spanish territorial waters and the captain forbade the gunner to fire. The commander of the submarine had no such scruples. He fired. The gunner then opened fire and the submarine disappeared. The passengers had been ordered below, and when the *Ashcrest* put out a smoke screen, they thought the ship was on fire, for the smoke filled the holds. Everyone remained calm.

## §24

AS THE LONG DAYS WORE ON, the strain became greater. One morning a little man, a chauffeur, suddenly began to shout incoherent words and looked as though he were going to throw himself overboard. His face was livid and his eyes were frantic. Two or three men seized him, and he was led away to one of the officers' cabins and guarded by relays of volunteers. On the same afternoon I saw a woman whom I knew slightly show signs of great agitation. I tried to calm her. She started to tremble all over, looked wildly up at the sky as though for enemy planes, then with a shriek fell to the iron deck. Altogether four persons went out of their minds. One of them, a man between forty and fifty, was an ex-officer, and I think he lost his reason owing to a sudden and enforced deprivation of alcohol. He was quite harmless and used to wander about in fantastic clothes that he had somehow got hold of. One day he plastered his chest with decorations he had made out of pieces of paper and with a rolled-up sunshade that represented a swagger stick reviewed his regiment. He went up to a startled group sitting on the bulwarks and said:

"Your buttons aren't polished. Perfectly disgraceful."

Then he turned to an imaginary officer behind him and in a barking voice asked him what the devil he meant by not seeing that his men were properly turned

out. Once, draped in blankets, he saw himself as an Arab sheik standing proudly on the ramparts of his citadel; he scanned the desert for the oncoming hordes and shouted superbly: "Let 'em all come." On another occasion he was the squire of dames, and when some woman got up from the deck to change her seat insisted on carrying her knitting for her and with old-world courtesy arranged her cushion when she sat down again. He was probably the happiest man on board, for he lived in a world of illusion. It was a sad day for him when we arrived at Gibraltar and he was able to get a bottle of whisky; he recovered his wits, such as they were, and re-entered the grim world of reality.

But I think the oddest person on board was one who would have been vastly surprised if anyone had told him that he was in any way unusual. This was the butler of a neighbour of mine on Cap Ferrat whom I had persuaded to come with me. A tall grey-haired man, of dignified presence, with a long, thin face, and a manner which was at once affable and distant. Because I was a friend of his mistress he saw fit to give me the sort of attention he would have done if I had been a visitor in her house; at the crack of dawn he brought me a cup of tea, he brushed my grimy clothes and, though I was entirely indifferent to it, shined my shoes. Though we sat on the iron deck to eat our meals, he waited on us with the same ceremony as he would have used at a dinner party. Nothing disturbed him. On the afternoon when we had the scare of which I spoke just now,

he came up to his mistress, who was standing with me at the side trying to see the periscope, and said:

"Will you have your tea now, madam, or will you wait till the excitement subsides?"

His clothes got as grimy as ours did, his finger-nails were as black, but he maintained an air of neatness. I tried to get him to tell me what he thought about it all, but he knew his place too well to be willing to confide in me.

"They're a funny lot of people, sir," was the utmost I ever got him to say. "Not the sort of people we're accustomed to."

I didn't know where he slept, but when I inquired and asked him whether he was getting enough to eat, he intimated to me in his polite way that it was none of my business.

"I'm not complaining, sir."

I don't know whether it occurred to him that, every night when we turned in, it was an even chance that we would all of us end it in the sea. Never by a word, nor by a change of expression, did he give a hint that everything wasn't what you'd expect in a well-regulated household. To the end he remained calm and unruffled, civil but not obsequious, attentive, good-humoured, faintly sarcastic and dignified.

There was an old lady on board, over eighty, who had not wanted to leave her only home, but had been persuaded by her daughter and her daughter's husband, with whom she lived. She was unfit to travel. It was

a cruel thing to send her away, and it was evident enough that her daughter and son-in-law had looked upon this as a God-given opportunity to be rid of her for good. The shock and fatigue broke her. She became maudlin and spent hour after hour curling her thin white hair with trembling fingers. Then it became plain that she was dying. The ship's hospital contained three bunks. It had been given to a young man crippled by infantile paralysis so that it would have been impossible for him to climb up and down the ladder that led to the hold. A day or two before sailing he had married a capable, kindly and comely young woman who had been his nurse. The old sick woman was put into the tiny hospital, and the newly married couple nursed her. Never can two people have spent a sadder honeymoon. They shared the cabin with her while she was dying. They shared the cabin with her when she lay dead. Sailors made a shroud for her out of sacking, and she was buried at midnight. A clergyman read the burial service over her, and the bride and bridegroom were the chief mourners. The whole convoy stopped for one minute while those poor remains were cast overboard; but not, as you might think, out of respect for the dead; alas, at that moment there was no time for that: it stopped for fear that the poor little corpse would foul our propeller.

After we had been five days at sea we were told that we would be landed at Oran, in Algeria, there to await instructions from Gibraltar. We hoped another and

more suitable ship would be sent to fetch us. The captain of the *Saltersgate* was most unwilling to take us on. The passengers were exhausted and some of the older people were only just alive. It seemed impossible that they could endure the ordeal any longer. The aged widow had no sooner been removed from the bunk in the hospital than her place was taken by another who was dying of cancer, and she lay there, a woman with small, distinguished features, silent and uncomplaining. Her only wish was to die in England.

The conditions in the ship were dreadful. The food was insufficient and unsuitable. There was lavatory accommodation for a crew of thirty-eight, and there were more than five hundred of us.

We were in great spirits at the thought that our troubles would soon be over; but they fell when we reached the harbour and were told that we were not to go ashore. That morning the news had come of France's capitulation, and the authorities expected at any moment to receive instructions to hold the ship and perhaps intern the refugees. It was an anxious moment. The day passed in interviews, somewhat heated, between the captain of the ship and the vice-consul at Nice in whose charge we were, on the one side, and the French officials on the other. At last our captain managed with his own wireless to get through to Gibraltar and received an order to get what food he could and come on at once. It was unfortunately a Sunday, and most of the shops were shut, but he went

round in a taxi with the ship's chandler and bought five hundred pounds of bread, all the fruit he could get, matches and cigarettes. Of these we were in great need. A French convoy happened to be starting for Gibraltar that night; we joined it and arrived on the Tuesday morning.

This time we thought our troubles really were over.

We had made plans to go to hotels and rest, to have a bath and a square meal; we had looked forward to seeing the last of that ship. We were told that no one would be permitted to land. Many broke down then, and it was painful to see their distress. Women wept. You must not be too hard on us. We were undernourished; we had been terribly uncomfortable for a week and had had little sleep. I suppose few of us composed ourselves to rest at night without reflecting that we might be torpedoed before morning. But what had most to do with shattering our nerves was not the discomfort, the lack of food or sleep and the danger, but the dirt. We were filthy, and it was intolerable. It was a cruel disappointment. A naval officer came on board and made us a speech. He explained that, with thousands of refugees already arrived, there was no room for us in Gibraltar, that Fifth Column activities were feared, and that Gibraltar was a fortress from which the greater part of the civilian population had been evacuated; finally that the government would do what it could to relieve our necessities, but we must make the best of a bad job, and, worst news of all, must

go back to England in the ship we were in. Eventually, however, the captain and vice-consul were allowed to land, and they put our wretched plight before the authorities. The result was that the children, the sick, and persons of seventy and over were taken off. This left us with only two hundred and eighty, and, as directed, we set about making the best of this very bad job. Then we had a bit of luck. An order came that we were to be allowed on shore for a couple of hours in batches of fifty. We used our time in having a bath—I think none of us can ever have enjoyed a bath more—in buying food, rugs and mattresses, pails to wash in, drink and tobacco. Work was done on the ship to make the lavatory accommodation more adequate. Rafts were built. Stores were sent in.

We stayed in Gibraltar three days. Being in the last batch of those who went ashore, I found all the mattresses sold out, but I bought myself a quilt that did instead. I bought sardines, biscuits, sauce to make the bully beef more palatable, canned fruit, a couple of bottles of whisky and a bottle of rum. There was more space in the ship now, and I moved out of the hold and made my bed under the fo'c'sle head in the bosun's locker. It was smelly because the food was kept there, but I found a couple of planks and, putting them side by side on three baskets, made a bed which was very comfortable after the iron deck. My companion, an Australian, who was an ingenious fellow, made a pail out of an old jam tin, and this served as a washbasin in

the morning and as a soup tureen at midday. Soup was our staple meal after we left Gibraltar. We got hold of a broom, and he made a dustpan out of the top of a biscuit tin, so that we were able to keep our cramped quarters tolerably clean. To this man I owe it that I passed the rest of the journey well enough. He was small and spare, with a sharp, wrinkled face and fine eyes. He had been an officer in the last war, but before and after had followed a dozen callings; he had been a tramp, a bartender, a sheep-shearer, an engineer, a journalist; and having, I have no notion how, saved a bit of money, had bought himself a cottage in the hills behind Nice with the intention of passing his remaining years there. He said he was fifty, but I think he was much older. He was returning to England now with five pounds in his pocket to start life again. He could put his hand to anything, and there was no object, a piece of wood, a piece of sacking, a piece of string that he couldn't find a use for; and he was immeasurably kind: there was no door to our little cabin, though he had made a curtain out of sacking that kept out the worst of the wind, which grew very chilly in the morning as we went north, and on one occasion at dawn I awoke to find that he had put his own blanket over me and was lying on his back, smoking cigarettes, because the cold prevented him from sleeping.

## §25

WE SAILED in a convoy escorted by a destroyer and a sloop. Because I was supposed to be a sensible person, I was told when submarines were signalled and when an air raid was threatened; and I was told that it would be a miracle if our engines held out, and if they broke down we should have to drop out of the convoy. I was told to keep these pleasant bits of information to myself; but, to tell the truth, I would just as soon not have been told them myself. Except for this the days passed pleasantly enough.

After breakfast, which consisted of a piece of stale bread with marmalade and a cup of tea, I smoked my pipe and read. I have been accustomed for years to start the day with some serious reading, and I did not see why I should break the habit, so from the time I got on board the *Saltergate* I spent an hour or so every morning reading my *Plato*. I had often read before the dialogues that tell of the trial and death of Socrates, but never had I found them more moving. The circumstances, the danger we were in, gave them a peculiar significance. During the afternoon I read a novel and played patience. I had not read *Esmond* for forty years and had completely forgotten it. I had somehow got the idea that it was a cold, dull book; but I did not find it so. I thought it well written and interesting. It had a nobility of spirit and a brave gallantry which seemed

to me very appropriate to the moment. I enjoyed *Villete* too; it is naïve and charming. It may be that excessive use is made of coincidence, but that is too much in the period to offend me, and I liked the plush-and-broadcloth savour of its romance. The headmistress of the school and the irascible little professor may be a trifle absurd, but they are wonderfully alive. After our supper at seven I told stories to anyone who cared to listen. At first I told the stories which I had stored in my memory and which I had a notion someday to write, but I reached the end of these and then I had to go back on experiences of my own. Here is one of them which they thought amusing. It is more than I did. If I relate it here it is not for its own sake, but to show with what a pleasant nonchalance these people took the chance of a submarine popping up on the surface at any moment and sending them all to fight vainly for their lives in the impassive sea.

I was in Munich one summer to attend a Wagner festival and, staying at the same hotel as I was, was a young woman I had met several times in London. Her name was Gladys. She was a very respectable young person, and I was a trifle surprised to see the company she was in. She was with two flashy-looking men and a still more flashy-looking woman. I didn't know her well and didn't like her much, so when I saw her with her friends I did no more than give her a distant nod. I was surprised to receive a note from her an hour later asking me to meet her in the hall. When I went down

she told me that she was in trouble. She had joined the party, knowing none of them more than slightly, and when they had got to Munich, travelling straight from London, she had discovered that the woman was having an affair with one of the men and that she had been asked for the entertainment of the other. He made it clear what form he expected this to take, and when she objected they all turned very nasty and asked her why on earth she had come. I had only caught a glimpse of her friends, but that had been enough to tell me that their question was very natural. When I suggested that she should leave them, she told me that she was there as their guest and had nowhere to go till she could join her mother, who was arriving at Baden-Baden in five days. She had only enough money to get there.

"But did you think," I asked her, "that people you hardly know were going to pay your ticket and your hotel expenses just for the pleasure of your conversation?"

"I don't know why not," she answered. "I've always been considered a very good conversationalist."

I looked at her reflectively. That's always a good thing to do when the only thing you have to say is tart.

"I'm in an awful position," she went on. "The men are foul to me, and Amy only speaks to me to tell me I'm a rotten little prig and a spoil-sport."

She began to bite her handkerchief, and I thought she was going to cry.

"I don't know what I can do about it. Would you like me to talk to them?"

I didn't much fancy the idea of that, but I couldn't think of anything else.

"It wouldn't do any good. They've got it in for me now. I'm absolutely desperate."

"Then what do you want me to do?"

"Can't I go around with you these few days?"

I gave a slight start. I had things to do, and I had looked forward to a little holiday in my own company. I didn't think it very flattering that she should think I was as safe as all that.

"It would be awfully kind of you," she added. "I won't be any trouble, and we can have a grand time together."

"It would be lovely," I said.

That afternoon we went for a walk in the English garden. I was then a successful dramatist, and Gladys gave me a long talk, almost a lecture, on the technique of the drama. I got her a seat for the opera, and during the intervals she discoursed upon Wagner's aesthetic theories and explained to me in detail his use of musical motives to illustrate character. There was no opera next day, and we went for an excursion. In the morning she gave me a circumstantial summary of Bavarian history and in the afternoon explained to me how one should write a novel and illustrated her statements by an acute analysis of the respective merits of Tolstoy, Turgenev and Dostoevsky. One morning we went to the picture gallery and with lucidity, though not with-

out diffuseness, she pointed out to me that Rembrandt was a greater artist than Murillo. She told me what I should admire in Albrecht Dürer. I understood why she was considered a good conversationalist.

We lunched together and supped together. Her fund of information never once ran dry. When once or twice we ran across her friend Amy and her two companions, they gave me sour looks, which I thought rather hard, as I was making *their* party. At last I saw Gladys off at the station.

"You've been simply wonderful to me," she said. "You've saved my life."

I walked wearily back to the hotel. I made up my mind that I would never again come to the rescue of a maiden in distress. Nor have I.

### §26

WE REACHED the blessed shores of England. We had been in that ship for twenty days without ever taking our clothes off. From beginning to end, with few exceptions, this crowd of refugees behaved with coolness and courage. Social distinctions soon went by the board. Our common dirt did that. There were a number of persons whose selfishness was unconquerable. For instance, they would get into the food queue twice and

so get a double supply of our scanty rations. When we were arriving at Oran, thinking we should leave the ship, we got up a subscription for the crew, and when it appeared that we would have no such luck one woman went to the steward and asked him to give her a double ration at supper that evening.

"I'm afraid I can't do that, madam," he answered.

"I think you ought, you know," she said crossly. "When they passed round the hat this morning I gave a hundred francs."

"I'm sorry, madam, I can't. But I shouldn't like you to think you'd subscribed to the gratuity fund and got nothing for it." He took a note out of his pocket and handed it to her. "Let me give you your hundred francs back."

But such as she were few. Most were astonishingly unselfish. They were eager to help one another. Women with precious face creams would give them to those who had run short. We shared towels and soap and indeed whatever we had to share. It seemed to me that the selfish became more selfish and the unselfish more unselfish. I am bound to add that for the moment the selfish had the better of it. I should not like to end this part of my narrative without paying a tribute to the crew who worked like dogs to make our lot tolerable, to the officers who gave up their cabins to the old and sick, and to the skipper, Captain Stubbs, to whose courage, skill and firmness we owed it that we were brought safely home.

## §27

IT WAS GOOD to be in England again. I went to London and took a room at the Dorchester. I was tired and dirty. It was good to have a bath, put on clean clothes, dine well and sleep in a bed. I discovered, somewhat to my astonishment, that my friends had been anxious about me; I had been unable to inform them of my whereabouts, and a rumour had gone around that I had been captured by the Germans. People seemed to want to know about my escape, so I described it over the air, with the result that I was inundated with letters from persons with friends or relatives in France who wanted news of them. Some were pathetic, and it was a grief to me that I could tell the writers nothing to relieve their distress.

The first thing that struck me on my return to England was the optimism that everywhere prevailed. I had had an inkling of it when I stepped aboard the *Saltergate*. The crew were rough Glasgow boys, and their faces were as black with coal dust as their grimy clothes. They talked with so strong an accent that it was hard for an Englishman to understand them, but there was no mistaking the sense of what they said. They were friendly and willing and they bubbled over with high spirits. Ever since the war began they had been sailing the dangerous seas, and did they care for Jerry's bombs and Jerry's torpedoes? Not they.

Their confidence was infectious, and if you asked one of them what he thought about France he replied with gay effrontery:

“It doesn’t matter; we can lick the Jerries alone.”

And at Liverpool, in the officials who came on board, in the porters who took our baggage, in the people in the streets, in the waiters at the restaurant, you felt the same spirit of confidence. Fear of invasion? Not a shadow of it.

“We’ll smash ‘em. It’ll take time, of course, but that’s all right; we can hang on.”

I found the same spirit in London; I found the same spirit in the country, where the corn in the fields was beginning to turn golden and the apples on the trees already weighed down the branches. Though the collapse of France was a bitter blow and Hitler was announcing that he would sign the treaty of peace in London on August 15th, it was splendidly clear that the people of Britain were undismayed. It was, indeed, a very different England from the England I had left a few weeks before. It was more determined, more energetic and more angry. Winston Churchill had inspired the nation with his own stern and resolute fortitude. There was no more half-heartedness. I talked with numbers of people, from privates to generals, from farm labourers to landed proprietors, to poor women and rich, to clerks and financiers; I found everywhere the same sense of the gravity of the situation, the same resolve to continue the struggle to victory,

and the same readiness to give everything to achieve it. The British people had realized at last that they were fighting for their existence, and to defend their freedom they were prepared for any sacrifice that was demanded of them. In that dark hour their courage was transcendent.

The only persons who seemed to me unchanged were the officials of the Foreign Office. I met them sometimes at dinner, and I was amazed to hear the casual, ironical way in which they spoke of the situation. You would have thought the war was a game of chess; if your opponent made a move that endangered your queen you parried it, of course, but you had to admire his nimble strategy, and if in the end he beat you, well, after all it was only a game, a very interesting one, and it didn't vastly matter; next time, perhaps, you'd beat him. I conceived the notion that they had led lives so shut off from ordinary human interests that they were incapable of taking serious things seriously. I have a hope that after the war the diplomatic service and the consular service will be combined and that before these gentlemen become attachés in embassies and clerks in Downing Street they will serve for a term of years in consulates so that they may come in contact with the ordinary run of men and acquire some knowledge at first hand both of human nature and of the conditions under which men live. It will doubtless dawn upon them then that they are of the same clay as other mortals.

I was eager to get back to work, but there seemed nothing much for me to do except to write articles. In order to get material for such of these as the occasion appeared to call for, I had to see a number of the men in whose control lay the conduct of the war. Among them was Sir Alan Brooke, the commander in chief of, the Home Forces. I found a sturdily built man, of about the middle height, with greyish, thick-growing hair, a hooked, rather fleshy nose under which was a line of dark moustache, and with powerful, stubby hands. He gave me an impression of physical strength, and this struck me as peculiar, because he had an intellectual, sensitive face. He looked more like a scientist than a soldier; and if I had been sitting with him in a bus and he were in mufti, I should have taken him for a professor of physics in the University of London. His voice was strident. He spoke well, fluently and with decision. I don't think anyone could spend an hour with him without coming to the conclusion that he was an able, determined and cool-headed man.

After what I had seen in France, where the failure of morale in the population had, I thought, so greatly contributed to the lamentable collapse, I was anxious to find out if my general impression of the state of mind of the British would be confirmed by one who had better opportunities of judging than I could hope to have, so the first question I put the commander in chief was what he thought of the morale of the people at

large. He told me that he could not praise it too highly and as an example mentioned the Home Guards. These are volunteers, men in civil employment—though many of them served in the last war—who have been called for to deal with parachutists and attempts at sabotage, to protect bridges, railways and docks, and generally to make themselves useful in case of invasion. The vast majority are working-men, and they have been asked to perform these duties in addition to their day's work. The response was so great that it was found necessary to call a halt, since it was impossible immediately to equip so many.

From the morale of the nation, it was natural to go on to talk of the morale of the army. I think no one could have heard the ringing, convinced tone of the general's voice when he spoke of the troops he had commanded in France without sharing his confidence in them. Nothing demoralizes men more than to hold a position, perhaps with considerable losses, and then be ordered to retire because the support on their flanks has failed them; and when they take up a new position, they are apt to think: "What's the use? Why should we lose a lot more fellows holding it, when we shall have to fall back again?" This is what happened time and time again in Flanders, when the Belgian Army capitulated and the French on the other flank abandoned the field. The British troops held each successive position with undiminished determination. It is no wonder the general was proud of them. And

later, when he was withdrawing his army to the sea, they encountered French troops who had thrown away their arms and were marching haggard and broken, an army no longer, but a rabble surging along the Belgian chaussées. You would have expected such a sight to upset the British troops; but they marched stubbornly on. There are advantages in a race that is so—what?—so unimaginative or so unemotional, so pigheaded or so stolid, that it doesn't react to impressions of this sort because it doesn't know how to. The fact is that the British troops in France were never forced to retire by pressure on their front, but only by the withdrawal of their allies on their flanks. They returned to England with nothing but the clothes they stood up in, tired and hungry—but as full of fight as ever.

It had occurred to me that one of the causes of the French defeat was that the army had been left through a long winter of inaction with nothing to do, so that they had grown bored and discontented, and I put it to General Brooke that, if the Germans did not invade England that summer, the vast forces that made Great Britain a huge fortress would have to confront a situation similar to that which had had so unhappy an effect on the French troops. He reminded me that the British Command had had to deal with it during the previous winter; they had done so by keeping the men working, but not excessively, by providing them with entertainment, and by giving them short periods of leave at frequent intervals. I suggested that the soldier

of to-day is a more highly educated man than the soldier of five-and-twenty years ago; he is accustomed to using his brain as well as his hands.

"Of course," he said. "But don't forget that the training of the modern soldier is very different from what it was a generation back. Then he had only to learn to fire a rifle and drill; a certain amount of drill is needful, but there is nothing so heart-rending, especially to an educated man, as this eternal marching about a barrack square. The modern soldier is a technician who has to learn a great deal. That keeps his brain active and his interest alive."

It was plain enough that the General Staff was very much alive to the necessity of intensifying activities of all kinds so that the men should be kept occupied and happy.

As we know, it is the superiority the Germans had in aircraft which allowed them to achieve their victories over the unhappy countries they have conquered. Of course we were building planes, but were we building enough? Of course we were buying them in America, but were we buying enough? These were the questions I heard asked. Thinking an article on the subject would be timely, I made up my mind to find out for myself

what I could about the production of aircraft. I thought I need not concern myself about the airmen. Their daring, their coolness and presence of mind, their indifference to odds, their endurance, had been shown in a hundred battles and praised by the press of the whole world. I had myself known several members of the R.A.F., and when I looked at their youth, my heart was wrung because, with all life before them, they had to take such fearful risks. Some of them showed cheeks so smooth that you felt a safety razor was only recently a necessary part of their equipment; and yet they were so light-hearted, so gay, reckless yet confident in their skill, boys in appearance but men in experience, wily and knowledgeable, with old heads on young shoulders, that it was not enough to be proud of them; I was filled in their presence with a great humility.

I knew one somewhat more intimately; he was a little older than the others, twenty-four, and quite a little chap, not more than five foot four, I should guess (just the right height for a pilot, he said), jaunty, with a care-free look in his impudent blue eyes. He had crashed early in the war and had nearly broken his neck, but after a few weeks in hospital and a niggardly leave, had gone to work again. He came to see me soon after his return from France, and he had grim stories to tell of how the French, after their surrender, had tried to prevent the British planes from getting away, how they had refused to give them gas and oil, and how they had driven trucks over the airfield to prevent

those whose tanks were full from taking off—bitter, shameful stories, but not such as it is any use to dwell upon. Shortly before, he had had a scrap with two German planes, one of which he brought down; a lucky shot pierced the oil tank, and so close were they that the oil splashed over his own plane, with the result that he could not see through his windscreen, but had to guide himself home by looking backwards over his shoulder.

"They were rather interested in that when I got in," he said. "An expert came and examined the oil, and he said it was rotten—we wouldn't use oil like that in a truck."

I asked him if he wasn't scared.

"Not then," he said. "I've never been scared in a scrap—it's too damned exciting." He thought for a moment. "But I'll tell you when I have been scared. When I was on a reconnaissance by myself. When you're up there all alone, hour after hour—— Gosh, my knees shook. You feel there's no one in the world but you, and the sky looks so damned big. There's nothing to be afraid of really, I don't know why it should make you feel funny."

"Infinity," I suggested.

He was a jovial, cheery soul. He was in tearing spirits because he had two days' leave and was determined to have the time of his life. He was full of plans for the future. After the war was won, he was going to buy a sailing-boat, forty foot long, and sail with a friend to the South Seas.

"It doesn't cost anything to live there, does it?"

"Not much," I answered.

"I shall have a grand time."

I never saw him again. Perhaps he knows now that there's nothing so frightening in infinity after all.

No, I didn't think it was necessary to concern myself with the fighting men. But I wrote to Lord Beaverbrook, who was then Minister of Aircraft Production, and asked him if he could see me. This Ministry had not been in existence long, and I wanted to know something of what Lord Beaverbrook, with his great driving power, had accomplished. He is a man who has achieved success in most things he has set his mind to. He is an optimist, with the optimist's good conceit of himself, but he is a man of resource. He has boundless energy, and it has been well said of him that if you give him a job to do he will get results almost before the ink on his commission is dry. By return of post I received an answer to my letter saying that he didn't make appointments but would be glad to see me any time I went to the Ministry. He was engaged when I arrived, but I was immediately shown into his room; his visitor was still with him, but soon after took his leave. It occurred to me that to have another caller brought in was a very efficacious way of disposing of one who had had his say.

Low, the Australian caricaturist, has made the appearance of Lord Beaverbrook so familiar to the British public that each time you see him you have to

readjust your impression of him. He is not the little gnomelike creature with a satanic grin of Low's effective invention; he is not even small, five foot ten, I should say, squarely built, bald, with a rugged, deeply-lined face, grim except when he smiles, but his smile can be very engaging. He was very grim when he sat me down in a chair on the other side of the desk at which he was sitting, and crossing his arms, fixed me with eyes hard under the beetling brows.

"What d'you want of me?" he rasped.

The question was abrupt enough to be disconcerting if I had not known the answer. I asked him first to tell me how the British planes compared with the Germans in numbers.

"How can I?" he answered. "I don't know how many planes the Germans have got; every expert I consult gives me a different figure. But this I do know: we've got enough to crush any attack they can make."

"That's pretty good news," I said. "And when do you expect to reach your peak production?"

"Never. There is no peak," he answered. "The sky's the limit."

I did not after all write the article I intended, because the official at the Ministry of Air to whom I was referred gave me to understand that he would grant me facilities to see what I wanted only on the condition that he collaborated with me in the writing of it, and I have unfortunately no gift for collaboration. He was

in private life, I believe, connected with a firm of motor-car manufacturers.

### § 29

ANOTHER MAN I met at this time was A. V. Alexander. It was he whom Winston Churchill, when he formed his government, invited to take the place at the Admiralty which he was himself vacating. Alexander has been for years one of the most respected leaders of the Labour party, but he is not only a politician; he is a business man as well; he was the moving spirit behind the Co-operative Wholesale Society, and the astonishing success he has had in developing an undertaking that has been of such immense value to the working-man is sufficient proof of his acumen. He was First Lord of the Admiralty during the Labour administration and then acquitted himself with credit; when he resumed this office, he entered upon a job which he already knew a great deal about. He is a thick-set, stoutish man, with something of a jowl, which adds to the rugged determination of his face; a short, aggressive nose; keen, alert eyes behind horn-rimmed spectacles; a strong pugnacious jaw and short grey hair neatly cut. His manner is quiet but resolute. He puts on no frills, and when you go to see him, gets

straight down at once to the topic of discourse. He talks with the fluency of a man who is accustomed to public speech.

There are huge maps in the stately room of the First Lord, and he got up from his chair every now and then to illustrate a point on one or other of them. He pointed out the immense coastline that Germany had to defend; it reached from the top of Norway to the Spanish frontier of France; and British ships were building, British ships were very near completion. That jaw of his jutted fiercely as he told me that by then the British fleet was ready for anything.

Knowing how long I have lived in France and how close my relations had been with it, he talked to me of the attack the British Navy had made on the French fleet at Oran.

"I can't tell you how deeply I regretted the necessity of it," he said, "but what could we do? We possess at present fourteen capital ships, the Germans two or three and the Italians six. The French had nine. Add three and six and nine together. If we'd let the French ships fall into enemy hands, the balance in heavy ships would have been against us, and our ocean convoys would have been liable to destruction by hostile surface forces. We had to do it. We couldn't help ourselves. The French people were never allowed to know the terms we offered their fleet; they couldn't have been more reasonable—they couldn't have been more honourable." He looked at me suddenly.

"You're going to America, aren't you?" he asked.

"I think so."

"Well, what security would there have been for the commerce of America if the power of our main fleet had been outweighed? We're fighting their battle as well as our own. So long as the British fleet is there, America is safe. I wonder how safe she would be if it was destroyed."

### §30

SOON AFTER I got to London I met Monsieur Corbin, till the collapse of France ambassador to the Court of St James; he had then resigned and was staying at the Dorchester till his ship sailed for South America. I had known him for some time and had often lunched with him. He was a cold, distant, severe man, who gave you the impression that any friendly advances you might make to him would fill him with embarrassment. I ran across him as I was getting out of the elevator and he was getting in. We shook hands, and he congratulated me on my safe arrival. I had never seen him before but as the honoured guest at a party or as the courteous host in the splendour of his own embassy; I saw now a pale, worn, broken man, bowed down with the humiliation of his country; he looked twenty

years older; I was so shocked I could think of nothing to say; I thought it would be mortifying to him to express my bitter regret at what was so much greater a tragedy to him and impertinent to offer my condolences in a disaster in which consolation was unavailing. I stood there mute, staring at him stupidly, and was relieved when he stepped into the elevator.

As I have related, I spent six weeks towards the end of 1939 going round France in order to get the facts for the little book that was intended to show my fellow countrymen how great an effort the French were making to prepare themselves for the war, with what good will the workers were working to provide the material for its successful prosecution, and how efficient were their army and navy. In my book I told nothing that I hadn't seen with my own eyes. I reported my impressions as honestly as I could.

Looking back now, I saw that here and there some chance remark, some casual incident, like straws in the wind that show which way it is blowing, should have aroused my suspicions. I could only blame myself because I had paid little attention to them. I was so disconcerted by my obtuseness that when I got back to England I made a point of asking a number of persons who were in a position to have known facts that were hidden from me whether they had anticipated the utter and terrible collapse of France. I discovered that it had been as great a surprise to them as it had been to me. They had foreseen as little as I

that the great French nation with its vigorous and patriotic army would make less of a stand than the Poles; they had never envisaged the possibility that Frenchmen would be found to give up their capital without a struggle and to break their solemn and repeated promises.

I would not waste my time or the reader's, at this time of day, in stating, as I now propose to do, the reasons why, so far as I can learn them, France was driven to a shameful capitulation, if I were not convinced that when these reasons are soberly set forth much may be learnt from them that is of pressing importance both to the people of America and the people of Great Britain. The errors, the defects of temperament and character that caused the defeat of France are not peculiarly and essentially French; they are human, and we are all in our different ways liable to them. It is only by avoiding those errors and guarding against these defects that we can hope to escape the crushing disaster that overwhelmed the French nation.

I must ask the reader to forgive me if I repeat now much of what I have told him before by implication, but the subject seems to me to be important enough to be stated categorically. I must ask him also to believe that I have good authority for all I am going to say. I would not lightly say things that make nonsense of what I wrote in the book to which I have just referred; no one would go out of his way to confess that he had shown want of perspicacity and want of judgment. I

have loved France; I have many friends in France; I have never received anything but kindness from the French; they have held me in honour, and if I am the sort of man I am it is due in great measure to French art, French literature and French civilization. It is with grief, and without rancour, that I tell this story of confusion, self-seeking, pusillanimity and broken faith.

It is notorious that the French have always quarrelled bitterly among themselves on political and social questions, but they have always asserted that, when the country was in danger, they laid their disputes aside and presented a united front to the foe. So they said this time. It wasn't true. Such unity as existed in parliamentary circles was only on the surface; below it, the animosities that had been left behind by the Blum government raged fiercely. In the cabinet there was an ignoble struggle for position, and when the effort of all should have been to prepare France for the struggle, ministers were stabbing one another in the back. The Communist party was dissolved, and the deputies who belonged to it, regardless of the effect it might have on the workers, were arrested or put to flight.

Until the Blum government brought in reforms that in other countries had been secured long since, the condition of the working-man in France was very bad. Few employers ever gave a thought to the welfare of their employees. In one of the biggest department

stores in Paris the employees, as the first of their demands, asked that separate lavatory accommodation should be provided for men and women. Hours of work were excessive, and the workers were insufficiently paid to lead decent lives. To indicate the state of mind of the moneyed classes, I shall relate a conversation I had with a friend of mine, a kindly, upright and generous man who was a banker by profession. One afternoon I went to a communist meeting at Père Lachaise, the great Paris cemetery, and I noticed that on banner after banner were emblazoned these three words: "Peace, Work, Well-being." I met my friend that evening and said how strange I thought it that a hundred and fifty years after the Revolution, the French working classes should still be making this minimum demand.

"Surely, that's not much to ask," I said.

He grew very angry.

"Peace certainly," he said, "and work of course; but well-being, no—that's out of the question. They can't expect that."

Is any comment necessary? I don't think so. Of course the Blum government went too far and too quickly; the forty-hour week was impracticable in France; the moneyed classes grew frightened and hurried to place their money abroad; the franc fell and with it the government. The well-to-do heaved a sigh of relief, but the working classes were sullenly resentful. The wealthy had had a bad fright and from

that time were haunted by the dread of bolshevism. When war broke out, it was the spectre of this that loomed before them. Big business was in close relations with Germany, and among the aristocracy and the prosperous bourgeoisie there were many, very many, who had an admiration for the dictators because they thought they had saved their respective countries from the horror of Russian communism. They hardly made a secret of their conviction that, if they had to choose between a victory for Germany and the bolshevism that they foresaw as a result of the war, they preferred a Germany victory. So stupid were they that they thought the victors would leave them their fortunes, which a communist revolution would certainly take away from them.

Then there was the army. It was supposed to be the finest army in Europe, and the General Staff was generally considered to have achieved the highest possible efficiency. Let us take the men first. During that long winter of inaction the crusading spirit that had fired them at the mobilization died away. They were worried by letters from home telling them that their farms were perishing for want of labour, their shops were doing no trade, and their businesses were going to rack and ruin. Why couldn't they come home instead of sitting there behind the Maginot Line doing nothing? When fighting began in earnest they had already lost heart. But they would have fought well enough if they had been well led. They weren't. A

great change had come over France. Generalizations must always be qualified, and so I hasten to say that among the French were many, many thousands of men of the highest integrity, men imbued with a profound sense of human dignity, proud of their country and ready to sacrifice their lives to maintain its greatness. There were not enough. Democracy in the end depends on the virtue of the individual, and a democracy that is corrupt is doomed. No one who has not lived long in France can know how widespread was the corruption that existed in all classes of the population. There was a general decay of morality, an insane craving for pleasure, and a cynical contempt for honour. Many of the younger officers were thus affected. They would go to Paris on leave, or go home, and ask what they were fighting for; they would be just as well off under Hitler as under any other government; all they wanted was to live quietly and mind their own business; Hitler would let them do that, and what did they care about their empire or their navy? France was a great nation, and no one could conquer the spirit of France; it would still be France under German rule. The result of this feeling showed itself in battle. Of course there were many acts of heroism and many officers died in the performance of their duty, but there are terrible stories of troops left behind without their officers, who had scampered off to safety in their cars; and there are stories of officers who left their men to fend for themselves in order that they might rescue their own wives

and children from districts that the Germans might at any moment occupy. It is well known how the millions of refugees not only hampered the movement of troops, but added to the dismay of the population at large, so I need do no more than refer to this as one of the causes that contributed to the breaking of the French morale.

It was acknowledged that Gamelin was incompetent and was maintained in the supreme command because he knew how to pull political strings, but the French people had confidence in the General Staff. It was composed of men who were too old for their jobs, who had learned nothing since the last war, and who were blindly self-complacent. They refused to learn the lesson of the attack on Poland. Generals at the front themselves told me that Poland was defeated because she refused to accept the advice of the French General Staff. They told me that they were only waiting for the Germans to attack the Maginot Line and were certain that they could crush them. When the Maginot Line proved useless, they had no notion what to do. Nothing had been done to teach the men how to stand up against the German mechanized divisions, though the Polish officers who escaped to France did all they knew to impress upon the General Staff the lesson they had learnt from their own bitter experience; but the French generals despised the Poles and in their arrogant obstinacy would not listen. It is no wonder that the men were seized with panic and put up no resistance.

Foch had said: "If France is in danger, send for Weygand." When General Weygand was called in to stem disaster he examined the situation and told Reynaud it was hopeless. Reynaud reported this to a friend of mine, and added:

"What can I do when my commander in chief is a defeatist?"

Weygand had been a brilliant staff officer. He had a great reputation, and for fear of destroying this was unwilling to take grave risks. He is vain, ambitious, passionate and authoritative. After his retirement from the chief command under the age limit (he is well over seventy), he appears to have frequented the Paris salons and become infected with the fear of communism that prevailed in them. An ardent Catholic, he was deeply concerned with the degeneration of his fellow countrymen. He conceived a mystical belief that France could only be regenerated by a great trial, and when the catastrophe occurred, his belief was crystallized into this: France has sinned and must suffer. Well, that may be true, but it is not a frame of mind that will incite a commander in chief to strike for victory. When he lost hope of this, he devoted his energies to retaining control of the army so that he might defend the social order.

I need say nothing of Pétain. He is an old, tired man, stubborn and conceited, and by nature a defeatist. His inclinations have always been fascist. To those who had to do with him at the capitulation, he seemed

incapable of decision. Nor need I say anything of minor factors that proved the incompetence of the General Staff—the red tape, for instance, that hampered the efforts of energetic officers. One told me of an important document that he saw ready to be delivered to him in an office across the hall from his own office, and that took a week to reach him. It was a distance of ten yards. I need not speak of the lack of armaments in the places where they were needed. I had myself seen the factories where tanks were being manufactured in what seemed to me great quantities. Where were they when they were wanted to withstand the German attack? Large numbers were kept in the vicinity of the big factories. Why? There is only one plausible answer: to crush the workers if they should attempt to revolt.

I come now to the politicians. It is a story as lamentable as it is confused, of self-seeking, disloyalty, irresolution, fear and dishonesty. Ministers who had been dismissed intrigued against the ministers who had replaced them; members of the cabinet distrusted one another; Mandel, the ablest of them all, never had a fair chance because he was a Jew. Ex-ministers were in treasonable communication with the enemy. Women exercised a devastating influence. It is even said that Madame de Portes, Reynaud's mistress, forced her way into cabinet meetings; there is a story which seems well authenticated, that on one such occasion, when she was insisting on bursting in upon Reynaud, the officer

on guard had to restrain her by main force; and there is another story that when the British ambassador was trying to persuade Reynaud to keep his country's engagements with Great Britain, she burst open the door and cried:

*“Ne cédez pas, ne cédez pas.”*

“

It was Madame de Portes who induced Reynaud to take into his cabinet the disastrous Baudouin, who was made Minister for Foreign Affairs. He is a banker, a neo-Catholic, with the same sort of ideas upon the moral reconstruction of society as Weygand has, but I have met no one who believed in his sincerity. In his conversations with the British ambassador and with the Polish ministers (for it must be remembered that France had signed the same solemn treaties with Poland as with Great Britain that she would never make a separate peace with Germany) he showed himself grossly untruthful. He would not let the Polish representative see the terms of the armistice, which were lying on the table before him; and though the cabinet had already decided to accept them, told him that they would be refused and the government would go to Africa to continue the war from there.

But what is the use of going into this tortuous story of terrified, shortsighted men who put private interests before their country's welfare? Their cause was lost when, rather than blow up bridges and factories, which represented money, they left them to the use of the enemy. Their cause was lost when, rather than see

Paris destroyed as the Poles had the courage to see Warsaw destroyed, they abandoned it without a blow. Then panic seized the nation as it had seized the army, and there was no one to stay it. It was a moral failure that led to a material failure.

\* I can sum up the cause of the collapse of France in very few words. The General Staff was incompetent; the officers were vain, ill-instructed in modern warfare and insufficiently determined; the men were dissatisfied and half-hearted. The people at large were kept ignorant of everything that they should have been informed of; they were profoundly suspicious of the government, and were never convinced that the war was a matter that urgently concerned them; the propertied classes were more afraid of bolshevism than of German domination; their first thought was how to keep their money safely in their pockets; the government was inept, corrupt and, in part, disloyal. Is it a miracle that France was defeated? It would be a miracle if she hadn't been.

This time there was no Clemenceau, no Foch, to effect a miracle. But is France conquered? The army has been defeated, but there is the great mass of the people. They understand what has happened, or if not yet, they will when they find out what it is to live under the German heel, and will there be nothing they can do to free themselves? I cannot believe it. The French are a proud, brave people. I cannot but think that when they have recovered from the despair caused

by their shameful humiliation, leaders will arise, and determined men will be found to follow them.

I cannot believe that the French will submit tamely to the slavery which the Nazi victors will attempt to force upon them. Those of us who love France have no need to lose hope. The scum will be swept away. There are men in France who have integrity, patriotism and courage, thousands upon thousands of them; there are enough, I think, to enable them one day, when the time is ripe, to throw out the invader and restore France once more to her rightful place in the comity of nations.

It is not for pleasure that I have here narrated what seem to me the causes of the fall of this great country. What are the lessons that are to be drawn from the tragic story? Most of them are so obvious that I need not call attention to them, but one I must insist upon: If a nation values anything more than freedom, it will lose its freedom; and the irony of it is that if it is comfort or money that it values more, it will lose that too. And when a nation has to fight for its freedom, it can only hope to win if it possesses certain qualities: honesty, courage, loyalty, vision and self-sacrifice. If it does not possess them, it has only itself to blame if it loses its freedom.

## §31

ON MY RETURN to England I was made much of by my friends. They asked me to lunch; they asked me to dine. I soon discovered that there were two subjects especially that were causing them anxiety. One was the incompetence of a certain general. As we all know, one of the disadvantages of the democratic form of government is that when a man is comfortably ensconced in a billet for which he is unfit, it is the devil's own job to get him out of it; but still, though it takes time, it can be done; and I had not been back long before this general was relegated to a position of dignified obscurity and a better man put in his place.

The other subject was the Fifth Column. That it should be widely talked of was natural, for the impression that it is everywhere invisibly active is precisely that which German propaganda seeks to produce. It aims at spreading fear, despondency, mutual distrust and confusion. Now, the natural tendency of the public is to believe any alarming rumour; and when you have heard one, the inclination to make it a little more startling by adding something of your own when you retail it to your neighbour is difficult to resist. People are wise to take what they hear and read with a pinch of salt. But the Fifth Column is formidable; and since it was a contributory cause to the fall of Poland, Norway, the Low Countries and France, the reader will

perhaps have patience with me while I tell him something of what I then learnt of its aims and methods.

I examined a number of secret reports dealing with the Fifth Column, and I was fortunate enough to meet some of the men whose job it is to watch its activities in Britain and to take the necessary steps to counteract them. I cannot tell their names; I can only say that in appearance they do not at all resemble the secret agents of fiction. If you met them, you would never dream that they had anything to do with the occupation they follow. One of them was a tall, thin fellow with a small head, precise in manner, so that you might have taken him for a mathematical tutor; another was a plump man with grey hair and a grey moon face, in rather shabby grey clothes; he had an ingratiating way with him, a pleasant laugh and a soft voice. I don't know what you would have taken him for if you had found him standing in a doorway where you had sought refuge from a sudden shower—a motor salesman, perhaps, or a retired tea planter.

The purpose of the Fifth Column is to supplement warfare by civilian activities behind the enemy's lines. This has always been to some extent a method of war; but it has never been used with so much skill and success as by the Germans in the present conflict. They have been clever enough to adapt their measures to the special conditions of each country. Before invasion started, steps were taken to influence opinion, to collect information, and to effect disturbing acts of

sabotage; and these steps in numerous cases were facilitated by the fantastic negligence of the authorities: in Norway, for instance, German officials of the Lufthansa, pretending that they wished to investigate the possibilities of an air line, were allowed to inspect airports within three weeks of the invasion. Highly ingenious ways were devised for transmitting information. In Belgium posters advertising popular commodities, with maps and other useful intelligence on the other side, were pasted up on walls. Instructions were issued by means of advertisements in code in the daily papers; and in Yugoslavia advertisements in the pro-Nazi press were used to collect detailed information, ostensibly for holiday-makers, on billeting accommodation, water supplies and transport facilities.

Once invasion had taken place, Fifth Columnists played a more decided rôle. They sought to create confusion through the circulation of false reports by leaflets, telephone messages and word of mouth. They attempted to seize important points, airfields, government buildings, wireless stations, post offices and police stations. In Holland German civilians fired at Dutch troops from windows and roofs. Another important branch of the work was to guide the armed forces of the invader; and this, of course, needed local knowledge. Aircraft and ships may be guided by wireless or by many kinds of signals by night or day.

Here I may interrupt myself to narrate a little incident within my own knowledge. There is a tiny

spit of land in an English estuary that guards the approach to an important city, and here are stationed a number of men to repel a landing. They are constantly bombed. It is a lonely life they lead. The Y.M.C.A. has started a canteen there, where they can get tea and coffee, where they can sit and chat and write letters; and to help in the work of this canteen there came an English clergyman. He was a fine, upstanding man of dignified presence, a man of culture but a good mixer, and he made himself very popular with the soldiers by giving them cigarettes and candy; he interested himself in all that concerned them and was always glad to listen when they talked to him about their training camps and told him where their friends were stationed and where they expected to be sent. When the canteen closed for the night, he liked to have a pipe, and who can blame him? It was hot in there, so he drew back the curtains and opened the window; he lit his pipe with a fusee—which holds its flame for quite a considerable time. It was pointed out to him that this was a dangerous thing to do, but he said he must have a breath of air after spending so many hours in that stuffy atmosphere, and it was absurd to think there could be any risk in lighting a match. Half an hour later there was an air raid. Well, it might have been a coincidence. But when the same thing happened a second time and a third, it looked strange; he was sent for; he was asked questions; and then, to his great indignation, was put under arrest while his room was searched. His

interest in the soldiers had led him to make notes on much of what they had told him. He was taken back to his room, and a sentry was put on guard at the door; he spent the night walking up and down, up and down, and next morning was driven away by car under escort. So the canteen lost the services of this amiable, generous and sympathetic clergyman; the men didn't mind that so much; what vexed them was that they hadn't been allowed to lynch him.

### §32

IT IS NOT NECESSARY to exaggerate the power of the Fifth Column in Britain; it is foolish to give way to spy psychosis; but it would be idiotic to neglect a danger that the experience of other countries has shown to be very real. There are three sorts of Fifth Columnists in Britain: British subjects, enemy aliens and neutrals. The neutrals can be easily dealt with, for they can be deported; the enemy aliens can be interned. Large numbers have been, and a prodigious outcry was caused by it. Many were anti-fascists, anti-Nazis, and Jews who had fled to Britain to escape the concentration camps of their own countries, and who looked forward to the defeat of the Axis as their only hope of returning to their homes. Many were distinguished men who

were prepared to put their talents to the service of the country that had given them asylum. Many were men of the highest character whose sufferings at the hands of their opponents made it impossible to believe that they would engage in activities on their behalf. The press took up their cause with vehemence and exercised all their powers of invective against a bureaucracy that dealt so harshly with these wretched people. On the face of it they had a case. It seemed unbearable to imprison persons who had thrown themselves on the hospitality of a free people. They must eventually return to their own countries, and it would be lamentable if they went back with anger in their hearts because they had suffered unmerited hardships at the hands of those they thought were their friends. On the other hand, there was the lesson of the conquered countries. Germans, who were ostensibly opponents of Nazism, settled residents as well as refugees, were later discovered to be active on the Nazi side. The Gestapo was known to have had spies among the refugees, and these were sometimes Jews. We are at war, and it would have been criminal negligence not to take every possible precaution. Agitation against the indiscriminate internment of enemy aliens, fortunately for the good name of Britain, bore fruit; and all those in Class C (those considered above suspicion) were set at liberty. Many thousands continued to be detained; and many of these, perhaps the majority of those in Class B (those whom the tribunals considered doubtful),

are honestly hostile to Nazism and honestly friendly to Britain. They are deserving of every sympathy. A more difficult class to cope with were British subjects —either Germans and Italians who had been naturalized, or British-born. By an Act of Parliament recently passed, if there were good grounds to suspect persons of treasonable activities, they could be arrested and held without trial, but they had the right of appeal. At the time of which I write there were about twelve hundred under arrest. Most of them appealed, and their cases were carefully considered, but the appeal was allowed in only three or four. Since British justice is always sympathetic to the accused, it shows that the Home Office had good reasons for the step it took. Their lot is not a hard one. At first they were detained in prison, at Brixton or Wandsworth, but later they were placed in a military camp under the control of the Home Office. They wear their own clothes and do no work unless they want to; they can read papers, receive visitors and write and receive letters. You have only to read *I Was Hitler's Prisoner*, by Stefan Lorant, to see how differently political suspects under preventive custody are treated by the Nazis.

Fifth Column agents may be men, women or even children. The French caught a girl of twelve who was signalling from behind chimneys to give German snipers the position of the French. They may be disguised as clergymen, nurses, policemen, street-car conductors, Boy Scouts, railway employees or taxi

drivers. They may be in British naval, military or air-force uniforms. Before the invasion of Holland, Germans bought Dutch uniforms in great quantities, and these were smuggled across the border with the help of Dutch Nazis. They put them to good use later. On one occasion a British torpedo boat was fired on, by soldiers in Dutch uniforms whom the commander had offered to evacuate from a quayside in Holland; on another, a Fifth Columnist, disguised as a Dutch policeman, told a group of isolated Dutch troops that their friends were round the corner, and when they turned it, they found German troops barricaded across the road, who promptly slaughtered them. Another dodge was to drop a German woman near a road. She would wave to a truck for a lift, and when it stopped, German troops in ambush would kill the driver and seize the truck. These are ruses of war and must be accepted as part of the horrible game; but the Germans have used methods which even a strong stomach must turn at: for example, after the invasion of Holland, Fifth Columnists in civilian dress would march through the streets singing patriotic Dutch songs, and when a crowd collected, a machine-gun would open fire. If they met a Dutch officer, their leader would salute him, then turn and shoot him in the back.

It is a comfort to think that sometimes the Nazis' nefarious tricks were less successful. I collected three instances. The Dutch commander of a certain naval base discovered that two men in naval uniform had

smuggled themselves into the dockyard. He mustered the garrison, but the intruders could not be found; so he told the men that on the following day they were not to salute their officers. Two did, and were found to be the wanted men. In another case it was noticed that light signals were given at night by Fifth Columnists to German planes to signify that parachutists could be released. A Dutch ship patrolling the shallow waters, hearing the sound of aeroplane engines overhead, gave the same signal; whereupon parachutists were released and dropped into the sea. At Lodz, in Poland, Fifth Columnists on receiving the signal from the Breslau radio station, "The comrades of Dr. Eicholz to work," were to proceed to blow up railway tracks and bridges and attempt to seize the post office and telephone exchange. Besides revolvers, time mechanisms for bombs, fuses and detonators, they were provided with preserved food cans with false bottoms, the upper part containing meat, vegetables or oil, and the lower part dynamite. The final order to get going was sent to the leaders by telegram. The message ran: "Mother is dead, prepare wreaths." It seemed odd to the authorities that several different persons should receive this sad news at once and be given the same touching injunction. It certainly showed some poverty of invention. Twenty-four citizens were arrested, and what happened to them the report does not relate.

## §33

IT IS NO AFFAIR OF MINE to tell the people of America what hazards they run from the activities of the Fifth Column in their country. They are competent to take care of themselves; and an alien is well advised to mind his own business. But after all, if you saw a man about to drive his car over a rickety bridge, you would surely be justified in stopping him and warning him of the danger. It may be that rather than take a long detour he will risk it and get over safely; then he will call you a timorous fool; but you must take your chance of that. The interests of the United States and Great Britain are now so closely connected that no citizen of one country can remain indifferent to the situation in the other. It may be that the idea of union now is an impracticable dream, but there is a union of a common language, a common culture, a common morality which does not depend on the consensus of the people concerned, but which is as absolute and inescapable as the common earth we inhabit and the common air we breathe.

I have not the least doubt that great numbers of Italians and Germans who have settled in America are loyal to it; many have left their homes in Europe because conditions there were intolerable to them; many have fled an odious tyranny, and in their new-found freedom, in the golden opportunities you give

them they are happy to throw in their lot with yours; but can they entirely forget the land of their forbears? Is the bond common to them and the people of their own blood so weak that it can be altogether severed? Suppose that you, an exile for political reasons, had been settled in Rumania for a generation and found yourself well-content there, and then the United States were engaged in a war the issue of which none could tell—would not some deep primitive feeling arise in your heart so that you forgot the wrongs you had suffered from your country, and notwithstanding everything desired to see it conquer? I know it would in mine. And from that it is a small step to taking what measures present themselves to help it in its peril.

And do not forget that the Germans are ruthless. When they make threats, they carry them out if they can. You can expect no mercy from them. What would you do if you were a German immigrant, with your father and mother still in Germany, and an agent of the Gestapo (and don't think there are none of them in the United States; there are scores) came to you and said that if you would do this or the other thing to embarrass the rearmament of the United States, they would be given the ample food that you knew full well they needed, but if you refused, they would be sent to a concentration camp? Are you so sure that you would have the determination to refuse to do what you were asked? We must take human nature as it is. It is better to prevent

temptation from being put in a man's way than to expect him in all circumstances to resist it. To be strong when our humanity, when our affections are involved, is asking more from most of us than we are capable of. I cannot find it in my heart to blame the people who yield to such threats; I can only be sorry for them; but when the safety of the nation is at stake I think it only prudent to admit the possibility of their frailty.

Nor is it sensible to forget that the Germans are thorough. They have no great gift for improvisation, but they are systematic and far-seeing. They do not wait in our stupid British way to make their plans till the need for action arises. They leave little to chance. Here is a true story to show you with what method they prepare for eventualities. There is an aerodrome somewhere in England which, since the war has been repeatedly bombed. The airmen could not make out how the Germans had ever discovered it, for it was in a secluded place and so well camouflaged that it was practically invisible from the air. Yet the Germans found the target with no difficulty and dropped their bombs with unerring precision. One of the duties of the Home Guard is to make themselves familiar with every yard of the district in which they work; and one day a pair of them made their way into a huge property, a mile or two from this airfield, that had for years been untenanted. There was a great barn of a house and a vast park in which the grass had been allowed to grow knee-high. As they forced their way through

this, they noticed at a certain point that the ground underfoot felt different and that the grass there was shorter than elsewhere. They thought this odd and explored further. They discovered then that a broad, straight strip of land had been cultivated at one time, and when they went on, found to their surprise that this cultivated piece had a very strange shape. Inquiries were made, and it was learned that three years back, a party of Dutch bulb growers had rented the deserted park in order to try the experiment of growing tulips in England. Apparently the experiment had failed, for shortly before the war they gave it up and returned to Holland. The huge derelict house could be seen from miles off, and from the air that oddly shaped piece of land on which those honest Dutch horticulturists had grown their flowers showed in the long grass on either side as an immense arrow pointing straight at the aerodrome. The reason why the Germans managed to hit it with such wonderful accuracy was now clear to the meanest intelligence. It may seem strange that no British airman should have noticed the arrow, but the fact remains that none did, and I can but suppose that it was only visible if you knew it was there.

And here is a little story from my own knowledge. A childless couple—glad, I suppose, to add something to their modest income—took as a paying guest for the summer a little German boy who wished to learn English. He was a nice lad and they grew very fond of him. His visit was such a success on both sides that

it was repeated year after year. The English couple came to love him as though he were their own son, and the boy seemed devoted to them. When the war broke out, he was sixteen. It was with very heavy hearts that they, the man and his wife, took him to the station to see him off to Germany. They wanted to give him a parting present, and they had bought the sort of things a boy of sixteen would like, ties and handkerchiefs and a scarf, and these they made into a parcel which they handed to him as he stepped into the train. The woman kissed him good-bye with tears streaming down her cheeks; the boy seemed heart-broken to leave them. Just as the train started, however, he threw the little parcel at the man's head, and leaning out of the window, spat in the woman's face.

They are strange people, the Germans.

#### §34

THERE SEEMED NOTHING for me to do in England, and I decided to go to America. But that is not a thing that anyone can do without difficulty in these days. First I had to get my American visa, and for this I had to give proof that I had business there. I do not know whether American citizens are aware with what suspicion their consuls regard the wish of an alien to visit their

country. Once I told the plain truth when I was asked what was the motive of my journey; I said I was going to see my friends and enjoy myself. The consul informed me that this was inadequate, and I had to get a letter from my publisher stating that it was necessary for me to go to New York to arrange for the publication of a book. The alien may come to the United States to make money, but not merely to spend it. It seems an undue modesty on the part of the officials of the State Department to suppose that a foreigner may not wish to visit the United States for pleasure. But on this occasion my reasons were sound enough for me to obtain my visa with ease. But before the Passport Office would give me an exit permit I had to get the permission of the Ministry of Information, which regards authors with some suspicion, and then that of the Treasury.

The bombardment of London started. Since this narrative does not pretend to deal with historical events I shall say nothing about it except in so far as it affected the ordinary life of the private person which I was. The daylight raids caused no great inconvenience. People did not deliberately go out into the streets while they were on, but if they were out, paid little attention to them. At first the government offices closed when the siren sounded and the staffs went down to the shelter, but this interfered with work so much that instructions were issued that they should carry on notwithstanding. The large stores closed their doors, but the smaller shops continued to transact their

business. In the beginning the shelters were somewhat extensively used, but later on, going down to one occasionally to see if many people were there, I found it completely empty. The population of London soon grew so accustomed to the raids that the streets remained as crowded as usual and women went about their shopping with unconcern. When the raids came frequently it was sometimes difficult to tell if the siren you heard was the warning or the all-clear. I had a room on the top floor of the Dorchester, and one afternoon I was lying on my bed reading. The siren had sounded and I heard planes overhead. I was wondering whether it would not be prudent to go down to the lounge on the ground floor when a woman called me on the telephone. She had nothing particular to say, but, feeling lonely, wanted to have a chat. I did not think it was a very suitable moment for that, and I was perhaps rather short with her. But it is a thing I have often noticed, when a woman once gets a receiver in her hand she has great difficulty in putting it down again, and notwithstanding my brief replies my friend lightly touched on a large number of topics. At last she said irritably:

"I can't imagine what's the matter with this beastly telephone. I can't hear you. Why is there such a row?"

"There happens to be a raid on," I answered mildly.

"Is there? Why, I thought it was the all-clear that sounded. Are there any planes about?"

"There are."

"Oh? Where are they?"

"Well, in point of fact, they're just over my head," I replied.

At that moment the anti-aircraft guns in Hyde Park let fly with a terrific burst of firing. There was a silence at the other end of the telephone, and then a rather subdued voice:

"Perhaps I'd better ring off."

"Perhaps you had."

"I'll call you later," she said with determination.

Then the Germans began night raids. I think the first was one Saturday early in September. After that they came regularly soon after dusk and lasted till dawn. The first two nights I slept in my room. It was on the twelfth floor, but the noise of the anti-aircraft batteries not more than a hundred yards away was ear-splitting, and when a bomb fell in the vicinity the hotel shook like a dog that's just come out of the sea, so that sleep was difficult; I put my pride in my pocket and went down to the shelter. The first night I slept on three chairs, but I didn't find that very commodious, and seeing no reason why I shouldn't make myself as comfortable as I could, I went to Selfridge's and bought myself a mattress. I took this down to the shelter and placed it in a convenient spot. I undressed in my room and put on a dressing-gown, took a couple of pillows and the eiderdown with me and went down. After my three weeks on an iron deck in the *Saltergate* this

was luxury and I slept like a child. Now and then I would be awakened by the roar of the guns in Hyde Park, but that was a noise that filled me with confidence and I immediately went to sleep again. The all-clear sounded between five and six. There was then a general commotion of people getting up which awakened me, and I went into the kitchens which were next door to the shelter and got the cook to give me a cup of coffee; he had the news of the night, and after a little chat with him I went up to bed in my own room and slept again till breakfast time.

### §35

AT FIRST the social life of London was not much changed. I went to one dinner party that has remained in my memory as one of the most singular experiences I have ever had. It was in one of those little old houses in Westminster which during the last few years have become fashionable partly because, with their panelled walls and pretty chimney-pieces, they have character and partly because they are quiet and near the Houses of Parliament. There were ten of us at dinner, and afterwards when we went upstairs to the drawing-room we found that our hostess had prepared a treat for us. Owing to conditions there was a lot of distress among

musicians and to provide them with a little money persons of good-will now and then engaged them. A pianist, a cellist and a violinist were waiting to play to us. We made ourselves comfortable in arm-chairs and they began with a sonata of Haydn's. They had scarcely started when the siren screeched through the night; a few minutes later the anti-aircraft guns began to fire, quite close to us, so that it looked as though the German planes were not far off; but the players continued, no one taking the least notice of the infernal row outside, and when they came to the end we all applauded as though nothing had happened to disturb our enjoyment of the charming music. The firing went on and they played another piece. We spent a delightful evening, and since the raid was still going on and we could not stay indefinitely, we made our way home.

It was hard to get taxis at night in outlying districts, and it was inconvenient to walk in the street, not on account of the bombs that might fall, but on account of the shrapnel from the anti-aircraft guns. Some people went about in tin hats. One man who had been dining with me at the Dorchester on his way home saw a bomb drop about fifty yards ahead of him in Piccadilly. He threw himself on the ground and said to me afterwards:

“Lucky it hadn’t been raining. It would have ruined my clothes.”

A good many people spent the night where they

dined, and the lounge at the Dorchester was quite crowded with persons who rested there till the all-clear sounded at dawn, some who had just come to dinner, some who had sought refuge from houses near by where there was no shelter, and some who preferred it to the hotel refuge. There were others, however, who would not yield to the conditions. Few dressed in the evenings, but one couple I knew—an old, distinguished man, who had had a great career in the service of the state, and his wife—dressed every evening as though nothing untoward were going on. They used frequently to come to dinner with friends at the Dorchester and about ten, however severe the raid, would send for a taxi and drive quietly home. I happened to be at one of these parties, and the lady reproved me for wearing day clothes.

"I can see no reason," she said, "why, just because there's a raid, a gentleman shouldn't dress like a gentleman."

On one occasion a very old friend, a very witty woman, came to dine with me. We talked late and then she said to me:

"You're looking tired, I shall go home."

The raid happened to be particularly bad that night, so I told her that she really couldn't go out in it.

"I never heard such nonsense," she replied. "Call me a taxi. I never pay any attention to the raids."

I did as she bade me. Next morning I was awakened by a letter from her written in pencil. She told me that

when the driver had taken her back to her house she had come to the conclusion that it was unsafe for him to be out on such a night, so she had taken him in and spent the rest of the night talking to him. She had found him a most interesting and delightful man. It was by him she sent me the letter when the all-clear had permitted him to go.

At first there was a lot of grumbling among the very poor because the bombs fell in the districts they lived in, and they asked:

“Why doesn’t Hitler bomb the West End?”

And at that time the poor were the chief sufferers. Rich people who lived in substantially built houses were fairly safe in their basements; and if a bomb fell, they had a good chance of escaping with no more than a few cuts and bruises. Anything but a direct hit would smash the windows, but in all probability do little harm besides. But the long rows of little houses in which the working classes for the most part live are flimsily built. They offer no protection, and a bomb in the middle of the roadway may easily make the entire street uninhabitable. Thousands of people were rendered homeless and lost everything they possessed. And they had no balance at the bank to enable them to go to a hotel and provide themselves with a new outfit; they had no friends in the country with whom they could stay while they considered the situation. They bore the dangers to which they were exposed with courage and the discomforts with humour. I knew a poor woman in

Bermondsey who lived in one of the County Council apartment houses which had been built to clear the slums. She was a widow and, owing to the marriage of two of her children, the evacuation to the country of one small boy and the drafting of the older son, it was too large for her, but she had been unwilling to leave it after waiting a number of years to get it. It was destroyed. All she said was:

"Well, I couldn't really afford the rent, I'd 'ave 'ad to move into something smaller and I wouldn't 'ave been able to take all my furniture. P'raps it's just as well the Jerries 'ave smashed it. I shan't 'ave to pay for storing it now."

And one morning a night porter at the Dorchester went home to breakfast and as he ate his kipper remarked to his wife:

"Shut the window, dearie, will you? It's a bit chilly this morning."

She began to giggle.

"There ain't no window, dear," she replied. "I quite forgot to tell you, we was bombed last night."

He roared with laughter.

But the turn of the West End came very soon and the pavements in Bond Street and the adjacent streets were littered with broken glass. A friend of mine who lived in Albany, that old-fashioned, romantic building where Byron once lived, was lifted right out of his bed and deposited on the floor by an explosion. The Burlington Arcade, where thirty years ago fashionable

young men bought their shirts and ties, was reduced to a shambles. It was a grim sight to saunter through the eighteenth-century streets of Mayfair and see a great gap where a fine old house had been and sometimes, precariously perched on a fragment of a bedroom floor, a chest of drawers or a coat hanging forlorn on a peg. People took the loss of their possessions with singular equanimity. One morning a woman who had been bombed out of her apartment came in to the Dorchester. She had lost her furniture and all her clothes but those she stood up in. She was in great spirits and took the incident with gaiety. But when she sat down to breakfast and, asking for cream for her coffee, was told there was none, she flew into a passion. That was the last straw.

"I've been bombed out of my bloody flat," she cried, "and lost every damned thing I had in the world, and now there's no cream. If the country isn't going to hell, where the hell is it going?"

People carried on with their affairs as best they could. Men who had been bombed out of their houses in the night went to work as usual next morning. I had to go one day to the Bank of England just after it had been hit fair and square. Pretty well every window was broken, and some of the offices were in a sad state of disorder, but business went on, and the chief inconvenience seemed to be that some men had had to move out of their rooms and it took a little time to discover their new quarters. A friend of mine who lives in Maida

Vale had a grocer who was accustomed to call at his house for orders every morning at ten o'clock. The small business was run by a man and his wife, their son with his wife, and an unmarried daughter. They all lived over the shop. The daughter was a quick-witted girl and one day she said to her assembled family:

"I think it's a great mistake, us all living together like this. If the shop was bombed we'd all get killed very likely, and it would be bad for business and upset the customers something dreadful. I think we ought to separate."

It seemed a good idea, so the son and his wife took a room in a near-by street, the daughter in another, while the father and mother continued to live over the shop. Well, a few days later the house was bombed. The parents were extricated from the ruins and, fortunately not very much hurt, taken to the hospital. Then the young man and his sister put their heads together. The chief thing in their minds was that they mustn't let their regular customers down, so they went to another grocer who lived two or three streets away and asked him if he would let them conduct their business from his shop. He agreed to this, and that same morning at ten o'clock sharp the young man called at my friend's house for orders as though nothing in the world had happened to interfere with his usual habit.

A good many people left London, but many who had no business there refused to go. They liked to be in the middle of things, and in some strange way relished

the excitement and the risk. There was on the whole much less fear of the raids than there had been during the last war. There was anger. I knew of one man in the East End who was seen stepping over a dead body at the height of a violent attack and furiously shaking his fist at the planes that flew overhead. But you could not tell how people would be affected. A sort of fatalism seemed prevalent, and there was a pretty general feeling, I fancied, that if a bomb was destined to fall on you, it would and there was nothing to do about it. But on the other hand there was also a queer notion that other people might be hit, but you wouldn't be. There was no difference between women and men. I knew one man, a big, hulking, blustering fellow, whose nerve gave way completely; he couldn't sleep, he couldn't do his work; when a raid came he was paralyzed with terror and sat in a shelter hour after hour reading detective stories. At last he had to go for safety to some distant part of the country. During the last war he had been in France when a bomb fell on the building in which he was and everyone in the dressing station but himself was killed. I knew some women who were scared out of their wits, but wouldn't leave London because their husbands or their sons were there and they would not be parted from them. Their love was greater than their fear. But these nervous people were exceptional. The vast majority seemed to enjoy an increased vitality, they liked the thrill of living in stirring times, and they laughed at themselves and

one another. One elderly lady wrote to me after I left England: "I don't know if the raids are getting less severe, or if I'm getting used to them, but they don't disturb my night's rest any more. In fact I find them much less boring than my sons-in-law."

### §36

ONE DAY I went to Woolwich. The siren began to wail as we drove along, but as usual no one seemed to take much notice; motor traffic went on; people continued to walk in the streets; here and there two or three men standing in a doorway looked up at the sky on the chance of seeing planes, and some of the shops closed their doors; but that was all. We arrived at the great arsenal just as the all-clear sounded before lunch. It was not to see the works that I had come. I had come to see a concert party that was giving a performance in one of the canteens while the workers were having their midday meal.

They were already there waiting, two girls dressed alike in showy, inexpensive stage dresses; a comedian, a pianist and a man who played the fiddle and the guitar. It was the sort of concert party you see on the beach during the summer at English seaside resorts. They play in the open if the weather is fine, under canvas

when it grows chilly; and a bad summer is disastrous to them. You wonder what they do in the winter. It must be hard for them to get engagements even in provincial vaudeville houses; perhaps the girls get a few weeks around Christmas in pantomime; for even with all the indulgence possible, one has to acknowledge that it is a very indifferent show they put on. One of the two girls in this particular party was under thirty and prettyish, but the other was a middle-aged woman, raddled under her paint, with pinched features and peroxided hair. The comedian was a man of over fifty, and he told me that his son had been wounded during the retreat from Dunkirk. There would have been something terribly pathetic about this little band if it hadn't been for their high spirits and the delight they took in their work. They were proud to do their bit.

The workers crowded in. They took their places at the long tables, each with the plate of food handed out by servers at the serving counter; and while they ate prepared to have a good time. It chanced that they were chiefly women, and a number had brought their knitting with them; but men who had hurried through their own lunch to listen to the show stood in groups at the back and sides. It was a good dinner they had; I know because afterwards I ate it myself; there was an ample choice, and it was very cheap; I had beefsteak pudding, a treacle pie and a cup of coffee. The show lasted for twenty minutes. It began ordinarily enough with a song in which the company took part; then the

comedian, putting on a derby to show he was a funny man, did his piece; the younger of the two women played the concertina; then the older woman, raddled and painted, began to sing. She had little voice, and she had a cold, but she had immense vitality. The audience warmed up and soon she had them singing with her. In a minute it had ceased to be a set concert and had become a singsong. That was what the audience wanted, and for the rest of the time they all sang choruses and snatches of old songs. The concert came to an end, and the performers hurried off to another canteen to give a second show. They gave four in the twenty-four hours, two for the day shifts and two for the night. Each canteen had a concert once a week, but they had proved so successful that efforts were being made to give them more frequently.

I don't know who had the idea of starting these concert parties to give workpeople an entertainment in the factories; but I do know that when the idea was set before Ernest Bevin, the Minister of Labour, he at once saw its value and put it into effect. It was at his suggestion that I went down to see for myself how popular the plan was. Ernest Bevin is a remarkable man. He does not look like an Englishman. He is a large man, with a broad, fleshy, bashed-in face, a swarthy skin and bright, dark brown eyes; except for the irregularity of his features you might take him for an Italian. He has a fine resonant voice and expresses himself with vigour. His egoism is aggressive, and the

first person singular is undoubtedly the word that recurs most frequently in his conversation. For my part I am not affronted by the conceit of others; I have never noticed that modesty is a quality characteristic of politicians in general, and I am not sure that it is a valuable one; a man who has achieved a position of responsibility can only act effectively if he is confident in his own judgement; he must be assured that he is right in the decisions he makes, and this assurance he can only have if he has a good opinion of himself. I do not look upon it as a handicap that Ernest Bevin should have a good conceit of himself.

He has had a remarkable career. Born at Bristol of working-class parents, he went to work when he was eleven. He has followed a number of trades and among other things has been a docker. At the outbreak of the war he was general secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union and a member of the Trade Union Council. Content with the great power his position gave him, he had always refused to go into Parliament. His influence with labour was enormous. It was not till Winston Churchill had the brilliant idea of offering him the Ministry of Labour that he accepted a seat in the House of Commons. Here, though some of his fellow members were doubtless affronted by certain of his idiosyncrasies, all were impressed by his sincerity, his patriotism, his eloquence and his energy. Ernest Bevin persuaded the trade unions to accept measures necessary for the successful utilization of

labour which from any other man they might very well have refused even to consider. They are significant because they indicate a voluntary surrender on the part of workers of rights which they have achieved in the course of a long struggle and to which they justly attach great value. But it must not be thought that the Ministry of Labour concerns itself only with increasing the effectiveness of labour for the production of war material. The social services have been not only maintained, but augmented. Now there is a curious thing to note about this Ministry: created in 1917 as an off-shoot of the Board of Trade, its activities, though useful, were limited in scope; but with the war, it had to deal with a vast increase of business, and a very large staff was engaged. It has a backbone of civil servants who are conversant with the work with which the Ministry is occupied, but the great majority of the persons it employs are amateurs, though amateurs with special qualifications.

The civil servants of Britain are a body of very intelligent men, scrupulously honest and highly conscientious, but they are slaves to red tape. I do not think it unfair to say that they have an instinctive hostility to constructive effort. They have acquired an unparalleled skill in obstruction. They are shy of responsibility, and they have discovered that the safest way not to make a mistake is to do nothing. The unhappy person who is forced to have dealings with them is inclined to think that they do not look upon themselves as the servants

of the public, which of course they are, but as masters of a machine. They have gained of late a power that is almost absolute, and they exercise it, certainly with unvarying courtesy, with a ruthless determination. Let me give you one trifling example of red tape. It seems incredible, but I am assured by the trustworthy person who told it to me that it is true. When a general at the War Office needs a car for some official errand, he has to fill up five copies of his application, and this has to be signed by an officer equal in rank to his own; then the application goes to a civil servant—and if he thinks fit, he can refuse it.

The Ministry of Labour enjoys this advantage, that the civil servants employed by it have been for years concerned with industry, its problems and difficulties, and so are less divorced from real life than those of other ministries. They collaborate with good will with the labour men, with their expert knowledge, who occupy important positions in the organization. The result is flexibility, willingness to give promising ideas a trial, and the encouragement of initiative.

lives. They have worked many hours a day, and they have given up their Sunday rest and their summer holiday. When victory is won they will want their reward, and every sensible person must allow that they will have deserved it. Well, what will the reward be? It is very likely that the General Election which will then take place will see a great Labour majority in the House of Commons. The working man will have power. How will he use it?

Now, I am not a prophet or a politician and my own views can be of no value; all I can do is to tell the reader what I think are the ideas of the various men I talked with, skilled workmen in factories, foremen and Labour leaders. These Labour leaders are not young, hot-headed revolutionaries; they are men of mature age who have shown their capacity by conducting with success great enterprises, such as the society known as the Co-ops, or managing the affairs of the unions of which they are presidents or secretaries. They are united by the desire to better the conditions of life for the working classes, to assure them work and leisure, and to provide them with security when their working life is over. At Woolwich Arsenal I talked with a man whose job was to see to the comfort of the workers, to smooth out difficulties and to compose disagreements. He was an intelligent, sympathetic man. I asked him how they accepted the long hours, the loss of holidays, and the curtailment of their liberties. With good will, he told me, for they realized that they were inevitable; it was

astonishing that among those thousands upon thousands of people there should be so little trouble; they were all intent upon one thing—to win the war.

"But when it's over," he added, "they'll want their liberties back; and if they don't get them there'll be trouble. There's much they'll want changed."

When I asked Alexander, the First Lord of the Admiralty, what sort of an England he foresaw when the war was finished, he put it in a single phrase: a country where there's work for all, and no very rich people and no very poor people.

These were reasonable men I talked to, and I found nothing in their ideas that need frighten any sensible person. They anticipate a boom immediately after the war, as there was after the last one, but are fully aware that it will, as happened before, be followed by a slump; and profiting by past experience, they are anxious to avoid the disastrous effect it had then. Of course in England we shall all be very poor; there will be immense debts to pay and little money to pay them with; Labour foresees that certainly for some years long hours of work will have to continue, and it will not be till the situation has been straightened out that the ideal of the forty-hour week can be again seriously considered. The intention of labour is to introduce measures that will transfer the prime necessities of life from private ownership to the ownership of the state. It desires the trade of the nation to be conducted for the benefit of the community rather than for the profit of the indi-

vidual. This means revolution, but I gained the impression that it will be a revolution by consent. I found the propertied classes deeply conscious of the generosity, the reasonableness and the gallantry labour had shown, and, however painful the sacrifice they might be called upon to make, prepared to make it to enable the working class to enjoy the well-being they so richly deserved. I heard the owners of great houses acknowledge that the time for them was past. They accepted the change they foresaw in their style of living with resignation and even with cheerfulness.

### §38

WHEN I RETURNED to England I found everyone working like blazes. The incompetent, the self-seeking, the toadies, the timorous had retired into an obscurity, sometimes gilded, from which they should never have emerged. The country was united as, I think, it had never been before. I conceived the notion that the crisis was destroying the class consciousness which has been one of the evils of English life. I have a number of friends in Bermondsey, which is one of the poorer parts of London; the young men of that district who had been drafted found, very much to their surprise, that they liked being soldiers. They had better beds

to sleep in and better food to eat than they had ever had before; the regular exercise in the open air improved their health, and when they came home on leave their uniform gave them a success with the girls that added not a little to the satisfaction they felt because they were serving their country. More than one mother said to me of her son: "Why, it's made a man of him." Putting it as tactfully as I could, I asked two or three of them how they got on with the men who were not of the working class.

"Oh, they're all right," was the answer. "They're the same as everybody else really."

I met a number of these men, members of what I think you call in America the privileged class, who had been serving in the ranks, and they too liked the life. They had mixed on equal terms with the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker; they had eaten with them, slept with them, worked with them, played with them; and they had enjoyed it. It was they, I am pretty sure, who had done the most to level the barriers. For it is a mistake to think that it is the well-to-do (in England at least) who are standoffish to their social inferiors; on the contrary it is the poor who have the strongest feeling of class distinction, it is they who look upon members of the better-educated or more opulent class with suspicion; and it is this suspicion that these young men of gentle birth had managed by their good humour and good sense to dispel. I knew several who were so happy in the ranks that they were

loath to accede to the wish of their commanding officers that they should apply for a commission.

The English have been under the impression that they were generally liked abroad; because they had money to spare and were easy-going, because they liked to travel and could make themselves at home wherever they were, they thought they were popular. It has been something of a shock to them to discover in the course of this war that this was a delusion. Now, I think it will be admitted that they have many good qualities; but they are not good mixers and they are shy. It is pathetic sometimes to see them in a foreign country trying to ingratiate themselves and succeeding only in rubbing its inhabitants the wrong way. We are accused of snobbishness; and the charge is justified; it is perhaps our worst defect. It may be that it is natural to the English character; for it must not be supposed that it exists only in the upper and middle classes, it is just as strong in the working classes: the wife of the skilled workman will hesitate to associate with the wife of an unskilled workman; and I know myself of a case in Bermondsey where a very nice and pretty girl was looked down on by the family of her husband, a printer, because she came from a street that was considered mean, though to my eyes there was not a particle of difference between the shabby little row of houses her husband's family lived in and that in which her own family lived, and they were less than a mile apart.

But the snobbishness of the well-to-do has certainly

been fostered by the exclusiveness of their education. The public school—which in the United States is called the private school—has been for more than a century a characteristic feature of English life, and many good people are of opinion that the better qualities of the English are due to its influence. It is generally believed (though I think erroneously) that the Duke of Wellington said that the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing-fields of Eton. Now it is evident that parents will no longer be able to pay the sums it has cost them to keep their boys at these expensive schools, and already many of them are at their wits' end to keep going. They can only survive if they become once more what they were founded to be, public schools in which rich (such rich as there are) and poor can share the same education. They have outlived their usefulness, and I think it will be all to the good if, as the labour leaders desire, they are transformed into the same sort of institutions as the lycées of France and the gymnasia of Germany.

When all are educated together, rich and poor, high-born and low-born, the class consciousness which is the great obstacle in the way of mutual comprehension must surely disappear. Whatever their origins and circumstances, boys in the same school, doing the same tasks, playing the same games, are equal; and I think it permissible to hope that when they grow up, whatever their condition in after life, they will preserve the sense of the essential equality of all men which they

learnt unconsciously at school. And it may be also that when the English of this particular class, instead of spending their most impressionable years herded with other boys, spend them at home, going to school for the day, when they mix with boys of all sorts, they will lose that shyness that gives so many people who don't know them the false impression that they look upon themselves with excessive complacency. Then they will more easily gain the good will that their sterling qualities merit.

### §39

BUT BY NOW my papers were in order and I only had to wait till I could get a seat on the plane to Lisbon. I started from London one afternoon and went by train to Bristol; next morning, very early, I drove to the airport. It was a land plane I was to travel on, and I asked the pilot what would happen if we had to make a forced landing.

"We shall be very unlucky," he answered.

We flew out to sea, the windows screened, accompanied part of the way by Spitfires, and six hours later arrived in Lisbon. We carried a lot of mail but very few passengers. I am fortunate in that I seldom go anywhere without meeting with someone who for one reason or another excites my curiosity, and among my

fellow-travellers was an American with whom I made friends. He was an uncouth young man, large and clumsily built, with an ingenuous look on his broad face, large, pale, friendly eyes and a mop of untidy hair. He wore ill-fitting baggy clothes and a shocking hat. He told me that he, with a number of other Americans—forty, I think he said—had been studying medicine at the University of Glasgow; the war had caught him just as he was about to take his final examination, and he had been waiting since then for some means of getting away. I asked him why, with so many universities in America, Americans should go to Glasgow to study, and he told me that unless you had money or influence it was impossible to get into a good medical school in the United States. This seemed to me a strange state of affairs to obtain in a country that is both rich and democratic but I had no reason to doubt this statement. I discovered that he had never been on the Continent before, spoke no word of anything but English, and had no money but a few American dollars; I knew that Lisbon was crowded with refugees, and I had taken the precaution to engage by telegram a room at a hotel; he had made no plans; he did not know where he was going and had no notion how he would manage. I never saw anyone quite so helpless.

I thought I could not leave him to his own devices in a strange city, so when we landed I suggested that he should come to my hotel, where, if he couldn't get a room, he could at least sleep on a sofa or a couple of

chairs in the room reserved for me. But when we got there I found to my dismay that there was no room for me. We got back into the taxi, the driver of which fortunately understood Spanish, for I knew no Portuguese, and made a tour of all the principal hotels in the city. Every one was chockablock. After wandering about for two hours we at last found one room with two beds in it in a pension. It was none too clean, and the sheets filled me with misgiving. The food was execrable. But it was very cheap, which was an advantage to both of us, since I had been allowed to take out of England only ten pounds, and with the crowd of people who wanted to get on the clipper or go by sea to America it was impossible to tell how long one would be held up at Lisbon. It was a curious experience to be thrown into such intimate relations with a total stranger. He was amiable and embarrassingly grateful to me for taking care of him. We were together day and night. We spent long hours at the police station in a motley queue of foreigners, Poles, French, Germans, Belgians, Czechs, Russians, having our passports examined, for the Portuguese authorities make the way of foreigners very difficult, and during the week I spent in Lisbon I think I must have passed at least twelve hours of weary standing in one office and another to get permission to stay and permission to go. I never knew my friend's name. I think I never met a member of a learned profession who was so ill-informed. There wasn't a subject, except I presume

his own, of which he wasn't abysmally ignorant. I couldn't imagine how he was going to cope with the hard, competitive life of America; he certainly hadn't the sense to get out of the rain. At last in a moment of irritation I said to him:

“My poor boy, you don't know anything about anything.”

He gave me his slow, rather shy, attractive smile.

“I know I don't. I went to work as an errand boy when I was twelve years old. I've never had time to learn anything.”

I felt very badly and wished I hadn't spoken. His account of the various occupations he had followed in order to get his education was dull and strangely pathetic. I wondered whether it would not be possible so to arrange society that a poor boy who had ambition and industry might acquire the training for his chosen profession without that dreary and deadening drain on his energies. Doubtless this young man knew medicine —anyhow, enough to get the diploma he so proudly showed me—but he knew nothing else. He was without a trace of culture. He had nothing of what a real education can give. During those years of double toil, toil to acquire technical knowledge and toil to earn his living, youth, with its thrill and promise, had slipped through his fingers and now, at nearly thirty, he had the unformed mind of a boy of sixteen. I asked myself whether it was possible for him to be more than an indifferent doctor when he was so lamentably ignorant

of the world. To me he seemed one of those persons destined to failure of whom you wonder what purpose it can ever serve that they should have been born. He had not even the self-complacency that enables stupid people to accept their mediocrity with unction; he had on the contrary an engaging modesty. He was a tragic figure. However, it was no business of mine. Forty-eight hours later he got a mattress on a ship sailing for New York and in his clumsy, slouching way lumbered out of my life. If I saw him on the street tomorrow I shouldn't recognize him.

### §40

I SPENT A WEEK in Lisbon. I did a little sight-seeing, but could make no excursions since I had to hoard the few pounds I had. I stepped aboard the clipper one morning at half-past nine. I landed in New York next day soon after one. I had three dollars in my pocket. I ordered an old-fashioned.

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